

De Balzac

H. DE BALZAC

COMÉDIE HUMAINE

Editea by

GEORGE SAINTSBURY



H. DE BALZAC

THE UNCONSCIOUS MUMMERS

(*Les Comédiens sans le savoir*)

AND OTHER STORIES

Translated by

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with a Preface by

GEORGE SAINTSBURY

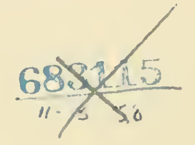


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PREFACE

A Prince of Bohemia, the first of the short stories which Balzac originally chose as make-weights to associate with the long drama of *Splendeurs et Misères des Courtisanes*, is one of the few things that, both in whole and in part, one would very much rather he had not written. Its dedication to Heine only brings out its shortcomings. For Heine, though he could certainly be as spiteful and unjust as Balzac here shows himself, never failed to carry the laugh on his side. You may wish him, in his lampoons, better morals and better taste, but you can seldom wish him better literature. Had he made this attack on Sainte-Beuve, we should certainly not have yawned over it; and it is rather amusing to think of the sardonic smile with which the dedicatee must have read Balzac's comfortable assurance that he, Heinrich Heine, would understand the *plaisanterie* and the *critique* which *Un Prince de la Bohème* contains. Heine 'understood' most things; but if understanding, as is probable, here includes sympathetic enjoyment, we may doubt.

It was written at the same time, or very nearly so, as the more serious attack on Sainte-Beuve in August 1840, and, like that, appeared in Balzac's own *Revue Parisienne*, though it was somewhat later. The thread, such as

there is, of interest is twofold—the description of the Bohemian *grand seigneur* Rusticoli or La Palférine, and the would-be satire on Sainte-Beuve. It is difficult to say which is least well done. Both required an exceedingly light hand, and Balzac's hand was at no time light. Moreover, in the sketch of La Palférine he commits the error—nearly as great in a book as on the stage, where I am told it is absolutely fatal—of delineating his hero with a sort of sneaking kindness which is neither dramatic impartiality nor satiric raillery. La Palférine as portrayed is a 'raff,' with a touch of no aristocratic quality except insolence. He might have been depicted with cynically concealed savagery, as Swift would have done it; with humorous ridicule, as Gautier or Charles de Bernard would have done it; but there was hardly a third way. As it is, the sneaking kindness above referred to is one of the weapons in the hands of those who—unjustly if it be done without a great deal of limitation—contend that Balzac's ideal of a gentleman was low, and that he had a touch of snobbish admiration for mere insolence.

Here, however, it is possible for a good-natured critic to put in the apology that the artist has tried something unto which he was not born, and failing therein, has apparently committed faults greater than his real ones. This kindness is impossible in the case of the parodies, which are no parodies, of Sainte-Beuve. From the strictly literary point of view, it is disastrous to give as a parody of a man's work, with an intention of casting ridicule thereon, something which is not in the least like that work, and which in consequence only casts ridicule on its author. To the criticism which takes in

life as well as literature, it is a disaster to get in childish rages with people because they do not think your work so good as you think it yourself. And it is not known that Balzac had to complain of Sainte-Beuve in any other way than this, though he no doubt read into what Sainte-Beuve wrote a great deal more than Sainte-Beuve did say. There is a story (I think unpublished) that a certain very great English poet of our times once met an excellent critic who was his old friend (they are both dead now). 'What do you mean by calling —— vulgar?' growled the poet.—'I didn't call it vulgar,' said the critic.—'No; but you meant it,' rejoined the bard. On this system of interpretation it is of course possible to accumulate crimes with great rapidity on a censor's head. But it cannot be said to be itself a critical or rational proceeding. And it must be said that if an author does reply, against the advice of Bacon and all wise people, he should reply by something better than the spluttering abuse of the *Revue Parisienne* article or the inept and irrelevant parody of this story.

Un Homme d'Affaires, relieved of this unlucky weight, is better, but it also, in the eyes of some readers, does not stand very high. La Palférine reappears, and that more exalted La Palférine Maxime de Traillles, 'Balzac's pet scoundrel,' as some one has called him, though not present, is the hero of the tale, which is artificial and slight enough.

Gaudissart II. and *Les Comédiens sans le savoir* are much better. The first, of course, is very slight, and the 'Anglaise' is not much more like a human being than most 'Anglaises' in French novels till quite recently. But the anecdote is amusing enough, and it is well and

smartly told. The longer and much more important story which follows seems to me one of the best and most amusing of what may be called (though it might also be called by a dozen other names) the Bixiou cycle of stories, in which journalism, art, provincials in Paris, young persons of the other sex with more beauty than morals, and so forth, play a somewhat artificial but often amusing series of scenes and characters. In this particular division of the series the satire is happy, the adventures are agreeably *Arabian-Nightish* with a modern adjustment, the central figure of the Southern Gazonal is good in itself, and an excellent rallying-point for the others, and the good-natured mystification played off on him is a pleasant dream. I think, indeed, that there is little doubt that the late Mr. Stevenson took his idea of *New Arabian Nights* from Balzac, of whom he was an unwearied student, and I do not know that Balzac himself was ever happier in his 'Parisian Nights,' as we may call them, than here. The artists and the actresses, the corn-cutters and the fortune-tellers, the politicians, the money-lenders, the furnishers of garments, and all the rest, appear and disappear in an easy phantasmagoric fashion which Balzac's expression does not always achieve except when his imagination is at a white heat not easily excited by such slight matter as this. The way in which the excellent Gazonal is forced to recognise the majesty of the capital may not be in exact accordance with the views of the grave and precise, but it is a pleasant fairy tale, and there is nothing so good as a fairy tale.

Of two other stories which have been included in this volume for reasons of mechanical convenience, *La*

Maison Nucingen has additional interests of various kinds. The story of Madame Surville, and the notary, and his testimony to Balzac's competence in bankruptcy matters, have been referred to in the General Introduction. *La Maison Nucingen* is scarcely less an example of this than *César Birotteau.* It is also a curious study of Parisian business generally, showing the intense and extraordinary interest which Balzac took in anything speculative. Evil tongues at the time identified Nucingen with the first Rothschild of the Paris branch, but the resemblances are of the most general and distant kind. Indeed, it may be said that Balzac, to his infinite honour both in character and genius, seldom indulged in the clumsy lugging in of real persons by head and shoulders which has come into fashion since his time, especially in France. Even where there are certain resemblances, as in Henri de Marsay to Charles de Rémusat, in Rastignac to Thiers, in Lousteau to Jules Janin, and elsewhere, the borrowed traits are so blended and disguised with others, and the whole so melted down and reformed by art, that not merely could no legitimate anger be aroused by them, but the artist could not be accused of having in any way exceeded his rights as an artist and his duty as a gentleman. If he has ever stepped out of these wise and decent limits, the transgression is very rare, and certainly Nucingen is not an example of it. For the rest, the story itself is perhaps more clever and curious than exactly interesting.

Facino Cane did not originally rank in the Parisian Scenes at all, but was a *Conte Philosophique.* It is slight and rather fanciful, the chief interest lying in

Balzac's unfailing fellow-feeling for all those who dream of millions, as he himself did all his life long, only to exemplify the moral of his own *Peau de Chagrin.*

Un Prince de la Bohème, in its *Revue Parisienne* appearance, bore the title of *Les Fantaisies de Claudine*, but when, four years later, it followed *Honorine* in book-form, it took the present label. The *Comédie* received it two years later. *Gaudissart II.* was written for a miscellany called *Le Diable à Paris* ; but as this delayed its appearance, it was first inserted in the *Presse* for October 12, 1844, under a slightly different title, which it kept in the *Diable.* Almost immediately, however, it joined the *Comédie* under its actual heading. *Un Homme d'Affaires* appeared in the *Siècle* for September 10, 1845, and was then called *Les Roueries d'un Créancier.* It entered the *Comédie* almost at once, but made an excursion therefrom to join, in 1847, *Où mènent les mauvais chemins* and others as *Un Drame dans les Prisons. Les Comédiens sans le savoir* appeared in the *Courrier Français* during April 1846, and also went pretty straight into the *Comédie.* But in 1848 it did outpost-duty with some other short stories as *Le Provincial à Paris.* There are some interesting minor details as its variants which must be sought in M. de Lovenjoul.

La Maison Nucingen (which the author also thought of calling *La Haute Banque*) originally appeared with *La Femme Supérieure* (*Les Employés*) and that part of *Splendeurs et Misères* entitled *La Torpille*, in October 1838, published by Werdet in two volumes. Six years later it took rank as a *Scène de la Vie Parisienne* in the first edition of the *Comédie.*

Before this appearance, *Les Employés* had appeared

in the *Presse.* *Facino Cane* is fairly contemporary with these, having first seen the light in the *Chronique de Paris* of March 17, 1836. Next year it became an *Etude Philosophique.* It had another grouped appearance (with *La Muse du Département* and *Albert Savarus*) in 1843, and entered the *Comédie* the year after.

G. S.

THE UNCONSCIOUS MUMMERS

To M. le Comte Jules de Castellane.

Léon de Lora, the famous French landscape painter, belongs to one of the noblest families of Roussillon. The Loras came originally from Spain; and while they are distinguished for their ancient lineage, for the last century they have faithfully kept up the traditions of the hidalgo's proverbial poverty. Léon himself came up to Paris on foot from his department of the Pyrénées-Orientales with the sum of eleven francs in his pocket for all viaticum; and in some sort forgot the hardships of childhood and the poverty at home in the later hardships which a young dauber never lacks when his whole fortune consists in an intrepid vocation. Afterwards the absorbing cares brought by fame and success still further helped him to forget.

If you have followed the tortuous and capricious course of these Studies, you may perhaps recollect one of the heroes of *Un Début dans la Vie*, Schinner's pupil, Mistigris, who reappears from time to time in various Scenes.

You would not recognise the frisky penniless dauber in the landscape painter of 1845, the rival of Hobbema, Ruysdael, and Claude Lorrain. Lora is a great man. He lives near his old master Hippolyte Schinner in a charming house (his own property) in the Rue de Berlin, not very far from the Hôtel de Brambourg, where his friend Bridau lives. He is a member of the

Institut and an officer of the Legion of Honour, he has twenty thousand francs a year, his work fetches its weight in gold ; and, fact even more extraordinary (as he thinks) than the invitations to court balls which he sometimes receives—the fame of a name published abroad over Europe by the press for the last sixteen years at length reached the valley in the Pyrénées-Orientales, where three Loras of the old stock were vegetating—to wit, his elder brother, his father, and a paternal aunt, Mlle. Urraca y Lora.

On the mother's side no relatives remained to the painter save a cousin, aged fifty, living in a little manufacturing town in the department, but that cousin was the first to remember Léon. So far back as 1840 Léon de Lora received a letter from M. Sylvestre Palafox-Castel-Gazonal (usually known as plain Gazonal), to which letter Lora replied that he really was himself—that is to say, that he really was the son of the late Léonie Gazonal, wife of Comte Fernand Didas y Lora.

Upon this, in the summer of 1841, Cousin Sylvestre Gazonal went to apprise the illustrious but obscure house of Lora of the fact that young Léon had not sailed for the River Plate, nor was he dead, as they supposed ; but he was one of the finest geniuses of the modern French school—which they refused to believe. The elder brother, Don Juan de Lora, told his cousin Gazonal that he, Gazonal, had been hoaxed by some Parisian wag.

Time went on, and the said Gazonal found himself involved in a lawsuit, which the prefect of the Pyrénées-Orientales summarily stopped on a question of disputed jurisdiction and transferred to the Council of State. Gazonal proposed to himself to go to Paris to watch his case, and at the same time to clear up this matter, and to call the Parisian painter to account for his impertinence. To this end, M. Gazonal sallied forth from his furnished lodgings in the Rue Croix des Petits Champs, and was astonished at the sight of the palace in the Rue de

Berlin; and, learning on inquiry that its owner was travelling in Italy, renounced for the time being the intention of asking him for satisfaction. His mind misgave him whether the great man would consent to own his mother's nephew.

Through 1843 and 1844 Gazonal followed the fortunes of his lawsuit. The local authorities, supported by the riparian owners, proposed to remove a weir on the river. The very existence of Gazonal's factory was threatened. In 1845 he looked on the case as lost beyond hope. The secretary of the Master of Requests, who drew up the report, told him in confidence that it was unfavourable to his claims, and his own barrister confirmed the news. Gazonal, at home a commandant of the National Guard, and as shrewd a manufacturer as you would find in his department, in Paris felt so utterly insignificant, and found the cost of living so high, that he kept close in his shabby lodging.

The child of the South, deprived of the sun, poured maledictions upon Paris, that 'rheumatism factory,' as he called it; and when he came to reckon up the expenses of his stay, vowed to himself to poison the prefect or to 'minotaurise' him on his return. In gloomier moments he slew the prefect outright; then he cheered up a little, and contented himself with 'minotaurising' the culprit.

One morning after breakfast, inwardly storming, he snatched the newspaper up savagely, and the following lines caught his eye at the end of a paragraph: 'Our great landscape painter, Léon de Lora, returned from Italy a month ago. He is sending a good deal of his work to the Salon this year, so we may look forward to a very brilliant exhibition——' The words rang in Gazonal's ears like the inner voice which tells the gambler that he will win. With Southern impetuosity, Gazonal dashed out of the house, hailed a cab, and went to his cousin's house in the Rue de Berlin.

Léon de Lora happened to be engaged at the moment, but he sent a message asking his relative to breakfast with him next day at the Café de Paris. Gazonal, like a man of the South, poured out his woes to the valet.

Next morning, overdressed for the occasion in a coat of corn-cockle blue, with gilt buttons, a frilled shirt, white waistcoat, and yellow kid gloves, Gazonal fidgeted up and down the boulevard for an hour and a half, after learning from the *cafétier* (so provincials call the proprietor of a café) that gentlemen usually breakfasted between eleven and twelve.

'About half-past eleven,' so he used to tell the story afterwards to everybody at home, 'two Parisians in plain surtouts, looking like nobodies, came along the boulevard, and cried out as soon as they saw me, "Here comes your Gazonal!——"'

The second comer was Bixiou, brought on purpose to 'draw out' Léon's cousin.

'And then,' he would continue, 'young Léon hugged me in his arms and cried, "Do not be cross, dear cousin; I am very much yours."—The breakfast was sumptuous. I rubbed my eyes when I saw so many gold pieces put down on the bill. These fellows must be making their weight in gold, for my cousin gave the waiter thirty *sols*—a whole day's wages!'

Over that monster breakfast, in the course of which they consumed six dozen Ostend oysters, half a dozen cutlets à la Soubise, a chicken à la Marengo, a lobster mayonaise, mushrooms on toast, and green peas, to say nothing of *hors d'œuvres*, washed down with three bottles of bordeaux, three of champagne, several cups of coffee and liqueurs, Gazonal launched forth into magnificent invective on the subject of Paris. The noble manufacturer complained of the length of the four-pound loaves, of the height of the houses, of the callous indifference towards each other displayed by the passers-by, of the cold, of the rain, of the fares charged by the 'demi-

fiacres'—and all so amusingly, that the pair of artists warmed towards him and asked for the story of his lawsuit.

'The histor-r-ry of my lawsuit,' said he, rolling his r's and accentuating every word in Provençal fashion, 'the histor-r-ry of my lawsuit is quite simple. They want my factory. I find a fool of a barrister, I give him twenty francs every time to keep his eyes open, and always find him fast asleep. He is a shell-less snail that rolls about in a carriage while I go on foot. They have swindled me shamefully; I do nothing but go from one to another, and I see that I ought to have gone in a carriage. They will not look at you here unless you hide yourself out of sight in a carriage. On the other hand, in the Council of State they are a pack of do-nothings that leave a set of little rascals in our prefect's pay to do their work for them. . . . That is the history of my lawsuit. They want my factory! *É bé* they will get it. . . . And they can fight it out with my workpeople, a hundred strong, that will give them a cudgelling which will make them change their minds——'

'Come now, cousin, how long have you been here?' inquired the landscape painter.

'For two whole years. Oh that prefect and his "disputed jurisdiction," he shall pay dear for it; I will have his life, and give mine for it at the Assize Court——'

'Which Councillor is chairman of your committee?'

'An ex-journalist, not worth ten *sols*, though they call him Massol.'

Lora and Bixiou exchanged glances.

'And the commissioner?'

'Funnier still! It is a Master of Requests, a professor of something or other at the Sorbonne; he used to write for some review. I p-r-rofess the deepest disrespect for him——'

'Claude Vignon?' suggested Bixiou.

'That is the name—Massol and Vignon, that is the style of the unstable firm of bandits (*Trestaillons*) in league with my prefect.'

'There is hope for it yet,' said Léon de Lora. 'You can do anything, you see, in Paris, cousin—anything, good or bad, just or unjust. Anything can be done or undone, or done over again here.'

'I will be hanged if I will stop in it for another ten seconds; it is the dullest place in France.'

As he spoke, the three were pacing up and down that stretch of asphalt on which you can scarcely walk of an afternoon without meeting somebody whose name has been proclaimed from Fame's trumpet, for good or ill. The ground shifts. Once it used to be the Place Royale, then the Pont Neuf possessed a privilege transferred in our day to the Boulevard des Italiens.

The landscape painter held forth for his cousin's benefit. 'Paris,' said he, 'is an instrument which a man must learn to play. If we stop here for ten minutes, I will give you a lesson. There! look,' he continued, raising his cane to point out a couple that issued from the Passage de l'Opéra.

'What is it?' inquired Gazonal.

'It' was an elderly woman dressed in a very showy gown, a faded tartan shawl, and a bonnet that had spent six months in a shop window. Her face told of a twenty years' residence in a damp porter's lodge, and her bulging market-basket showed no less clearly that the ex-portress had not improved her social position. By her side walked a slim and slender damsel. Her eyes, shaded with dark lashes, had lost their expression of innocence, her complexion was spoiled with overwork, but her features were prettily cut, her face was fresh, her hair looked thick, her brows pert and engaging, her figure lacked fulness—in two words, it was a green apple.

'It,' answered Bixiou, 'is a "rat" equipped with her mother.'

'A r-r-rat? *Quésaco?*'

Léon favoured Mlle. Ninette with a little friendly nod.

'The "rat" may win your lawsuit for you,' he said. Gazonal started, but Bixiou had him by the arm. It had struck him as they left the café that the Southern countenance was a trifle flushed.

'The rat has just come from a rehearsal at the Opéra. It is on its way home to its scanty dinner. In three hours' time it will come back to dress, if it comes on this evening in the ballet, that is, for to-day is Monday. The rat has reached the age of thirteen; it is an old rat already. In two years' time the creature's market-price will be sixty thousand francs; she will be everything or nothing, a great dancer or a super, she will have a name in the world or she will be a common prostitute. Her working life began at the age of eight. Such as you see her to-day she is exhausted; she over-tired herself this morning at the dancing class; she has just come out of a rehearsal as full of head-splitting ins and outs as a Chinese puzzle; and she will come back again to-night. The rat is one of the foundation stones of the Opéra; the rat is to the leading lady of the ballet as the little clerk is to the notary. The rat is Hope.'

'Who brings the rat into the world?' asked Gazonal.

'Porters, poor folk, actors, and dancers,' said Bixiou. 'Nothing but the direst poverty could induce an eight-year-old child to bear such torture of feet and joints, to lead a well-conducted life till she is sixteen or eighteen years old (simply as a business speculation), and to keep a hideous old woman always with her like stable-litter about some choice plant.—You will see genius of every kind go past—artists in the bud and artists run to seed—all of them engaged in rearing that ephemeral monument to the glory of France, called the Opéra; a daily

renewed combination of physical and mental strength, will and genius, found nowhere but in Paris.'

'I have already seen the Opéra,' Gazonal remarked with a self-sufficient air.

'Yes, from your bench at three francs sixty centimes, as you have seen Paris from the Rue Croix des Petits Champs—without knowing anything about it. What did they give at the Opéra when you went?'

'*William Tell.*'

'Good,' returned Léon, 'you must have enjoyed Mathilde's great duet. Well, what do you suppose the prima donna did as soon as she went off the stage?'

'Did?—What?'

'Sat down to two mutton cutlets, underdone, which her servant had prepared for her——'

'Ah! *bouffre*!'

'Malibran kept herself up with brandy—it was that that killed her. Now for something else. You have seen the ballet; now you have just seen the ballet go past in plain morning dress, not knowing that your lawsuit depends upon those feet?'

'My lawsuit?'

'There, cousin, there goes a *marcheuse*, as she is called.'

Léon pointed out one of the superb creatures that have lived sixty years of life at five-and-twenty; a beauty so unquestioned, so certain to be sought, that she keeps in the shade. She was tall, she walked well, with a dandy's assured air, and her toilette was striking by reason of its ruinous simplicity.

'That is Carabine,' said Bixiou, as he and the painter nodded slightly, and Carabine answered with a smile.

'There goes another who can cashier your prefect.'

'A *marcheuse* is often a very handsome "rat" sold by her real or pretended mother so soon as it is certain that she can neither rank as a first, nor second, nor third-rate dancer; or else she prefers her calling of

coryphée to any other, perhaps because she has spent her youth in learning to dance and knows how to do nothing else. She met no doubt with rebuffs at the minor theatres; she cannot hope to succeed in the three French cities which maintain a *corps de ballet*, she has no money, or no wish to go abroad, for you must know that the great Paris school trains dancers for the rest of the civilised world. If a rat becomes a *marcheuse*, that is to say, a *figurante*, she must have had some weighty reason for staying in Paris—some rich man whom she did not love, that is to say, or a poor young fellow whom she loved too well. The one that passed just now will dress or undress three times in an evening as a princess, a peasant-girl, a Tyrolese, and the like, and gets perhaps two hundred francs a month.'

'She is better dressed than our pr-r-refect's wife.'

'If you went to call on her, you would find a maid, a cook, and a manservant in her splendid establishment in the Rue Saint-Georges,' said Bixiou. 'But, after all, as modern incomes are to the revenues of the eighteenth century noblesse, so is she to the eighteenth century Opera girl, a mere wreck of former greatness. Carabine is a power in the land. At this moment she rules du Tillet, a banker with a good deal of influence in the Chamber——'

'And the higher ranks of the ballet, how about them?'

'Look!' said Lora, pointing out an elegant carriage which crossed the Boulevard and disappeared down the Rue de la Grange-Batelière, 'there goes one of our leading ladies of the ballet; put her name on the placards, and she will draw all Paris; she is making sixty thousand francs per annum, she lives like a princess. The price of your factory would not buy you the right of wishing her a good morning thirty times.'

'*Eh bé!* I can easily say it to myself; it will cost less.'

'Do you see that good-looking young man on the front seat? He is a vicomte bearing a great name, and he is her first gentleman of the chamber; he arranges with the newspapers for her; he carries peace or declares war of a morning on the manager of the Opéra; or he makes it his business to superintend the applause when she comes on or off the stage.'

'My good sirs, this beats everything; I had not a suspicion of Paris as it is.'

'Oh well, at any rate you may as well find out what may be seen in ten minutes in the Passage de l'Opéra.—There!' exclaimed Bixiou.

Two persons, a man and a woman, came out as he spoke. The woman was neither pretty nor plain; there was a certain distinction that revealed the artist in the fashion and colour of her gown. The man looked rather like a minor canon.

'That is a double-bass and a *second premier sujet*,' continued Bixiou. 'The double-bass is a tremendous genius; but the double-bass, being a mere accessory in the score, scarcely makes as much as the dancer. The *second sujet* made a great name before Taglioni and Elssler appeared; she preserved the traditions of the character dance among us; she would have been in the first rank to-day if the other two had not come to reveal undreamed-of poetry in the dance; as it is, she is only in the second rank, and yet she draws her thirty thousand francs, and has a faithful friend in a peer of France with great influence in the Chamber. Look! here comes the third-rate dancer, a dancer that owes her (professional) existence to the omnipotent press. If her engagement had not been renewed, the men in office would have had one more enemy on their backs. The *corps de ballet* is the great power at the Opéra; for which reason, in the upper ranks of dandyism and politics, it is much better form to make a connection among the dancers than among the singers. "Monsieur

goes in for music," is a kind of joke among the frequenters of the Opéra in the orchestra.'

A short, ordinary-looking, plainly-dressed man went past.

'At last here comes the other half of the receipts—the tenor. There is no poetry, no music, no acting possible without a famous tenor that can take a certain high note. The tenor means the element of love, a voice that reaches the heart, that thrills the soul; and when this voice resolves itself into figures, it means a larger income than a cabinet minister's. A hundred thousand francs for a throat, a hundred thousand for a pair of ankles—behold the two financial scourges of the Opéra.'

'It fills me with amazement to see so many hundred thousand francs walking about,' said Gazonal.

'You will soon see a great deal more, dear cousin of mine. Come with us.—We will take Paris as an artist takes up the violoncello, and show you how to play the great instrument, show you how we amuse ourselves in Paris in fact.'

'It is a kaleidoscope seven leagues round,' cried Gazonal.

'Before we begin to pilot this gentleman, I must see Gaillard,' began Bixiou.

'And Gaillard may help us in the cousin's affairs.'

'What is the new scene?'

'It is not a scene, but a scene-shifter. Gaillard is a friend of ours; he has come at last to be the managing director of a newspaper; his character, like his cash-box, is chiefly remarkable for its tidal ebb and flow. Gaillard possibly may help to win your lawsuit.'

'It is lost——'

'Just the time to win it then!' returned Bixiou.

Arrived at Théodore Gaillard's house in the Rue de Ménars, the friends were informed by the footman that his master was engaged. It was a private interview.

'With whom?' inquired Bixiou.

'With a man that is driving a bargain to imprison a debtor that cannot be caught,' said a voice, and a very handsome woman appeared in a dainty morning gown.

'In that case, dear Suzanne, the rest of us may walk in——'

'Oh! what a lovely creature!' cried Gazonal.

'That is Mme. Gaillard,' said Léon de Lora; and, lowering his voice for his cousin's ear, he added, 'You see before you, dear fellow, as modest a woman as you will find in Paris; she has retired from public life, and is contented with one husband.'

'What can I do for you, my lords?' said the facetious managing director, imitating Frederick Lemaître.

Théodore Gaillard had been a clever man; but, as so often happens in Paris, he had grown stupid with staying too long in the same groove. The principal charm of his conversation consisted in tags of quotation with which it was garnished, bits from popular plays mouthed after the manner of some well-known actor.

'We have come for a chat,' said Léon.

'*Encôre, jeûne hôme!*' (Odry in *Les Saltimbanques.*)

'This time we shall have him for certain,' said Gaillard's interlocutor by way of conclusion.

'Are you quite sure of that, Daddy Fromenteau? This is the eleventh time that we have had him fast at night, and in the morning he was gone.'

'What can you do? I never saw such a debtor. He is like a locomotive, he goes to sleep in Paris and wakes up in Seine-et-Oise. He is a puzzle for a locksmith.'

Seeing Gaillard smile, he added, 'That is how we talk in our line. You "nab" a man, or you lock him up; that means you arrest him. They talk differently in the criminal police. Vidocq used to say to his man, "They have got it ready for you!" which was all the funnier because "it" meant the guillotine.'

Bixiou jogged Gazonal's elbow, and at once the visitor became all eyes and ears. 'Does monsieur give palm oil?' continued Fromenteau, quite quietly, though there was a perceptible shade of menace in the tone.

'It is a matter of fifty centimes,' said Gaillard (a reminiscence of Odry in *Les Saltimbanques*), as he handed over five francs to Fromenteau.

'And for the blackguards?' the man went on.

'Who are they?'

'Those in my employ,' Fromenteau replied imperturbably.

'Is there any one lower yet?' asked Bixiou.

'Oh yes, sir,' the detective replied. 'There are some that give us information unconsciously and get no pay for it. I put flats and noodles lower than blackguards.'

'The blackguards are often very good-looking and clever,' exclaimed Léon.

'Then do you belong to the police?' asked Gazonal, uneasily and curiously eyeing this little wizened, impassive person, dressed like a solicitor's under clerk.

'Which kind do you mean?' returned Fromenteau.

'Are there several kinds?'

'As many as five,' said Fromenteau. 'There is the Criminal Department (Vidocq used to be at the head of it); the Secret Superintendence (no one knows the chief); the Political Department (Fouché's own); and the Château, the system directly in the employ of the Emperor and Louis XVIII., and so on. The Château was always squabbling with the other department at the Quai Malaquais. That came to an end with M. Decazes. I used to belong to Louis XVIII.; I have been in the force ever since 1793 along with poor Contenson.'

The listeners looked at one another, each with one thought in their minds—'How many men's heads has he cut off?'

'And now they want to do without us—tomfoolery!' added the little man that had grown so terrific all on a sudden. 'Since 1830 they will only employ respectable people at the prefecture; I sent in my resignation, and learned my little knack of nabbing prisoners for debt.'

'He is the right hand of the commercial police,' said Gaillard, lowering his voice for Bixiou; 'but you can never tell whether debtor or creditor pays him most.'

'The dirtier the business, the more need for strict honesty,' said Fromenteau sententiously; 'I am for those that pay best. You want to recover fifty thousand francs, and you higgle over farthings. Give me five hundred francs, and to-morrow morning we will have him in quod.'

'Five hundred francs for you yourself!' cried Théodore Gaillard.

'"Lisette wants a shawl,"' answered the detective without moving a muscle of his countenance. 'I call her "Lisette" because of Béranger.'

'You have a Lisette, and still you stay in your line!' cried the virtuous Gazonal.

'It is so amusing. Talk of field sports; it is far more interesting to run a man to earth in Paris!'

'They must be uncommonly clever to do it, and that is a fact,' said Gazonal, thinking aloud.

'Oh, if I were to reckon up all the qualities that a man needs if he is to make his mark in our line, you would think I was describing a man of genius,' replied Fromenteau, taking Gazonal's measure at a glance. 'You must be lynx-eyed, must you not? Bold—for you must drop into a house like a bombshell, walk up to people as if you had known them all your life, and propose the never-refused dirty business, and so on.—You must have Memory, Sagacity, Invention—for you must be quick to think of expedients, and never repeat yourself; espionage must always be moulded on the individual character of those with whom you

have to do—but invention is a gift of Heaven. Then you need agility, strength, and so on. All these faculties, gentlemen, are painted up over the door of Amoros's Gymnasium as virtues. All these things we must possess under penalty of forfeiting the salary of a hundred francs per month paid us by the Government, in the Rue de Jérusalem, or the commercial police.'

'And you appear to me to be a remarkable man,' said Gazonal. Fromenteau looked at him, but he neither answered nor showed any sign of feeling, and went away without taking leave, an unmistakable sign of genius.

'Well, cousin, you have just seen the police incarnate,' said Léon.

'I have had quite as much as I want,' returned the honest manufacturer. Gaillard and Bixiou chatted together meanwhile in an undertone.

'I will send round an answer to-night to Carabine's,' Gaillard said aloud; and sitting down to his desk, he took no further notice of Gazonal.

'Insolence!' fumed the child of the South on the threshold.

'His paper has twenty-two thousand subscribers,' said Léon de Lora. 'He is one of the great powers of the age; he has not time to be polite of a morning.'

'If go we must to the Chamber to arrange this law-suit, let us take the longest way round,' said Léon.

'Great men's sayings are like silver gilt,' retorted Bixiou; 'use wears the gilt off the silver, and all the sparkle goes out of the sayings if they are repeated. But where are we going?'

'To see our hatter near by,' returned Léon.

'Bravo! If we go on like this, we may perhaps have some fun.'

'Gazonal,' began Léon, 'I will draw him out for your benefit. Only—you must look as solemn as a king on a five-franc piece, for you are going to see *gratis*

an uncommonly queer quiz; the man's self-importance has turned his head. In these days, my dear fellow, everybody wants to cover himself with glory, and a good many cover themselves with ridicule, and hence we have entirely new living caricatures——'

'When everybody is glorious together, how is a man to distinguish himself?' asked Gazonal.

'Distinguish yourself?' repeated Bixiou—'be a noodle. Your cousin wears a ribbon; I am well dressed, and people look at me, not at him.'

After this remark, which may perhaps explain why so many orators and other great politicians never appear in the streets with a ribbon in their button-holes, Léon de Lora pointed out a name painted in gilt letters over a shop front. It was the illustrious name of an author of a pamphlet on hats, a person who pays newspaper proprietors as much for advertisements as any three vendors of sugar-plums or patent pills—VITAL it ran (LATE FINOT), HAT MANUFACTURER, not plain HATTER, as heretofore.

Bixiou called Gazonal's attention to the glories of the shop window. 'Vital, my dear boy, is making forty thousand francs per annum.'

'And he is still in business as a hatter!' exclaimed Gazonal, nearly breaking Bixiou's arm with a violent wrench.

'You shall see the man directly,' added Léon; 'you want a hat, you shall have one gratis.'

'Is M. Vital not in?' asked Bixiou, seeing no one at the desk.

'Monsieur is correcting proofs in his private office,' said the assistant.

'What do you think of that, hey?' said Léon, turning to his cousin. Then to the assistant, 'Can we speak to him without disturbing his inspirations?'

'Let the gentlemen come in,' called a voice—a bourgeois voice, a voice to inspire confidence in voters, a

powerful voice, suggestive of a good steady income, and Vital vouchsafed to show himself. He was dressed in black from head to foot, and carried a diamond pin in his resplendent shirt-frill. Beyond him the three friends caught a glimpse of a young and pretty woman sitting at a desk with a piece of embroidery in her hands.

Vital was between thirty and forty years of age; native joviality had been repressed in him by ambitions. It is the privilege of a fine organisation to be neither tall nor short, and Vital enjoyed that advantage. He was tolerably stout, and careful of his appearance; and if the hair had grown rather thin on his forehead, he turned the partial baldness to account, to give himself the airs of a man consumed by thought. You could see by the way that his wife looked at him that she admired her husband for a great man and a genius. Vital loved artists. Not that he had himself any taste for the arts, but he felt that he was one of the confraternity; he believed that he was an artist, and brought the fact home to you by sedulously disclaiming all right to that noble title, and constantly relegating himself to an enormous distance from the arts to draw out the remark, 'Why, you have raised the manufacture of hats to the dignity of a science.'

'Have you found the hat for me at last?' inquired Léon de Lora.

'What, sir, in one fortnight! A hat for *you*!' remonstrated Vital. 'Why, two months will scarcely be long enough to strike out a shape to suit you! Look, here is your lithograph, there it lies. I have studied you very carefully already. I would not take so much trouble for a prince, but you are something more, you are an artist. And you understand me, my dear sir.'

'Here is one of our great inventors; he would be as great a man as Jacquart if he would but consent to die for a bit,' said Bixiou, introducing Gazonal. 'Our

friend here is a cloth weaver, the inventor of a way of restoring the indigo colour in old clothes; he wanted to see you as a great phenomenon, for it was you who said, "The hat is the man." It sent this gentleman into ecstasies. Ah! Vital, you have faith! You believe in something; you have a passion for your work!'

Vital scarcely heard the words, his face had grown pale with joy.

'Rise, wife. This gentleman is one of the princes of science!'

Mme. Vital rose at a sign from her husband; Gazonal bowed.

'Shall I have the honour of finding a hat for you?' continued Vital, radiant and officious.

'At my price,' said Bixiou.

'Quite so. I ask nothing but the pleasure of an occasional mention from you, gentlemen. Monsieur must have a picturesque hat, something in M. Lousteau's style,' he continued, looking at Bixiou with the air of one laying down the law. 'I will think of a shape.'

'You take a great deal of trouble,' said Gazonal.

'Oh! only for a few persons; only for those who can appreciate the value of the pains that I take. Why, among the aristocracy there is but one man who really understands a hat—the Prince de Béthune. How is it that men do not see, as women do, that the hat is the first thing to strike the eye? Why do they not think of changing the present state of things, which is disgraceful, it must be said. But a Frenchman, of all people, is the most persistent in his folly. I quite know the difficulties, gentlemen! I am not speaking now of my writings on a subject which I believe I have approached in a philosophical spirit; but simply as a practical hatter I have discovered the means of individualising the hideous headgear which Frenchmen are privileged to wear until I can succeed in abolishing it altogether.'

He held up an example of the hideous modern hat.

'Behold the enemy, gentlemen. To think that the most intelligent nation under the sun should consent to put this "stove-pipe" (as one of our own writers has said), this "stove-pipe" upon their heads! . . . Here you see the various curves which I have introduced into those dreadful lines,' he added, pointing out one of his own 'creations.' 'Yet, although I understand how to suit the hat to the wearer—as you see, for here is a doctor's hat, this is for a tradesman, and that for a dandy or an artist, a stout man, a thin man—still, the hat in itself is always hideous. There! do you fully grasp my whole idea?'

He took up a broad-brimmed hat with a low crown.

'This is an old hat belonging to Claude Vignon, the great critic, independent writer, and free liver. . . . He has gone to the support of the ministry, he is a professor and librarian, he only writes for the *Débats* now, he has gained the post of Master of Requests. He has an income of sixteen thousand francs, he makes four thousand francs by his journalistic work, he wears a ribbon at his buttonhole.—Well, here is his new hat.'

Vital exhibited a head covering, the *juste milieu* visible in every line.

'You ought to have made him a harlequin's hat,' exclaimed Gazonal.

'Your genius rises over other people's heads, M. Vital,' said Léon.

Vital bowed, unsuspicious of the joke.

'Can you tell me why your shops are the last of all to close here in Paris? They are open even later than the cafés and drinking bars. It really tickles my curiosity,' said Gazonal.

'In the first place, our windows look their best when lighted up at night; and for one hat that we sell in the daytime, we sell five at night.'

'Everything is queer in Paris,' put in Léon.

'Well, in spite of my efforts and my success' (Vital

pursued his panegyric), 'we must come to the round crown. I am working in that direction.'

'What hinders you?' asked Gazonal.

'Cheapness, sir. You start with a stock of fine silk hats at fifteen francs—the price would kill the trade; Parisians never have fifteen francs of ready money to invest in a new hat. A beaver costs thirty francs, but the problem is the same as ever. Beaver, I say, though there are not ten pounds' weight of real beaver skins bought in France in a year. The article is worth three hundred and fifty francs per pound, and an ounce is needed for a hat. And besides, the beaver hat is not good for much, the skin dyes badly; it turns rusty in the sunshine in ten minutes, it subsides at once in the heat. What we call "beaver" is really nothing but hare-skin; the best hats are made from the backs, the second quality from the sides, and the third from the bellies. I am telling you trade secrets, you are men of honour. But whether you carry beaver or hare-skin on your head, the problem is equally insoluble—how to find fifteen or thirty francs of ready money. A man must pay cash for his hat—you behold the consequences! The honour of the garb of Gaul will be saved when a round grey hat shall cost a hundred francs. When that day comes we shall give credit, like the tailors. To that end people must be persuaded to wear the buckle, the gold galoon, the plumes, and satin-lined brims of the times of Louis XIII. and Louis XIV. Our business would expand ten times over if we went into the fancy line. France would be the hat-mart of the world, just as Paris always sets the fashion in women's dress. The present hat may be made anywhere. Ten million francs of export trade to be secured for Paris is involved in the question——'

'A revolution!' cried Bixiou, working up enthusiasm.

'Yes, a radical revolution. The form must be remodelled.'

'You are happy after Luther's fashion,' said Léon, always on the lookout for a pun. 'You are dreaming of a reformation.'

'Yes, sir. Ah! if the twelve or fifteen artists, capitalists, or dandies that set the fashion would but have courage for twenty-four hours, there would be a great commercial victory won for France. See here! as I tell my wife, I would give my fortune to succeed. Yes, it is my one ambition to regenerate the hat—and to disappear.'

'The man is stupendous,' remarked Gazonal, when they had left the shop, 'but all your eccentrics have a touch of the South about them, I do assure you——'

'Let us go along the Rue Saint-Marc,' said Bixiou.

'Are we to see something else?'

'Yes, you are going to see a money-lender—a money-lender among the "rats" and *marcheuses*. A woman that has more hideous secrets in her keeping than gowns in her shop window,' said Bixiou.

He pointed as he spoke to a dirty-looking shop like a blot on the dazzling expanse of modern street. It had last been painted somewhere about the year 1820, a subsequent bankruptcy must have left it in a dubious condition on the owner's hands, and now the colour was obscured by a thick coating of grime and dust. The windows were filthy, the door handle had that significant trick of turning of its own accord, characteristic of every place which people enter in a hurry, only to leave more promptly still.

'What do you say to this? Death's cousin-german, is she not?' Léon muttered in Gazonal's ear, pointing out a terrific figure behind the counter. 'She is Mme. Nourrisson.'

'How much for the guipure, madame?' asked Gazonal, not to be behindhand.

'To you, monsieur, only a hundred crowns, as you come from so far.' Then remarking a certain Southern

start of surprise, she added, with a touch of pathos in her voice, 'It belonged to the Princesse de Lamballe, poor thing.'

'What! here! right under the Tuileries?' cried Bixiou.

'Monsieur, "they" don't believe it,' said she.

'We did not come here as buyers, madame,' Bixiou began valiantly.

'So I see, monsieur,' retorted Mme. Nourrisson.

'We have several things to sell,' continued the illustrious caricaturist. 'I live at number 112 Rue de Richelieu, sixth floor. If you like to look in, in a moment, you may pick up a famous bargain——'

'Perhaps monsieur would like a bit of muslin; it is very much worn just now?' smiled she.

'No. It is a matter of a wedding-dress,' Léon de Lora said with much gravity.

Fifteen minutes later, Mme. Nourrisson actually appeared at Bixiou's rooms. Léon and Gazonal had come home with him to see the end of the jest, and Mme. Nourrisson found the trio looking as sober as three authors whose work (written in collaboration) has not met with that success which it deserved.

Bixiou unblushingly produced a pair of lady's slippers. 'These, madame, belonged to the Empress Josephine,' said he, giving Mme. Nourrisson, as in duty bound, the small change for her Princesse de Lamballe.

'*That?* . . .' cried she. 'Why, it was new this year; look at the mark on the sole.'

'Can you not guess that the pair of slippers is a prelude to the romance,' said Léon; 'and not, as usual, the sequel.'

'My friend here from the South,' put in Bixiou, 'wishes to marry a certain young lady, very well-to-do and well connected; but he would like to know beforehand (huge family interests being at stake) whether there has been any slip in the past.'

'How much is monsieur willing to pay?' she asked, eyeing the prospective bridegroom.

'A hundred francs,' said Gazonal, no longer astonished at anything.

'Many thanks,' said she, with a grimace which a monkey might despairingly envy.

'Come, now, how much do you want, Mme. Nourrisson?' asked Bixiou, putting his arm round her waist.

'First of all, my dear gentlemen, never since I have been in business have I seen any one, man or woman, beating down the price of happiness. And, in the second place, you are all three of you chaffing me,' she added, and a smile that stole over her hard lips was reinforced by a gleam of cat-like suspicion in her eyes. 'Now, if your happiness is not involved, your fortune is at stake, and a man that lives up so many pair of stairs is still less the person to haggle over a rich match.—Come, now, what is it all about, my lambs?' with sudden affability.

'We want to know about the firm of Beunier and Company,' said Bixiou, very well pleased to pick up some information concerning a person in whom he was interested.

'Oh! a louis will be enough for that——'

'And why?'

'I have all the mother's jewels. She is hard up from one quarter to another; why, it is all she can do to pay interest on the money she owes me. Are you looking for a wife in that quarter? You noodle! Hand me over forty francs, and I will give you a good hundred crowns' worth of gossip.'

Gazonal brought a forty-franc piece to light, and Mme. Nourrisson gave them some startling stories of the straits to which some so-called ladies are reduced. The old wardrobe-dealer grew lively as she talked, sketching her own portrait in the course of the conver-

sation. Without betraying a single confidence, without letting fall a single name, she made her audience shudder by allowing them to see how much prosperity in Paris is based on the quaking foundation of borrowed money. In her drawers she had keepsakes set in gold and brilliants, memorials of grandmothers long dead and gone, of children still in life, of husbands or grandchildren laid in the grave. She had heard ghastly stories wrung from anger, passion, or pique, told, it may be, by one customer of another, or drawn from borrowers in the necessary course of sedative treatment which ends in a loan.

'Why did you enter this line of business?' asked Gazonal.

'For my son's sake,' she replied simply.

Women that go up and down back stairs to ply their trade in are always brimful of excuses based on the best of motives. Mme. Nourrisson, by her own account, had lost three matches, three daughters that turned out very badly, and all her illusions to boot. She produced pawn-tickets for some of her best goods, she said, just to show the risks of the trade. How she should meet the end of the month, she did not know; people 'robbed' her to such a degree.

The word was a little too strong. The artists exchanged glances.

'Look here, boys, I will just show you how we get taken in. This did not happen to me, but to my neighbour over the way, Mme. Mahuchet, a ladies' shoemaker. I had been lending money to a Countess, a woman with more crazes than she can afford. She swaggers it with a fine house and grand furniture; she has At Homes, she makes a deuce of a dash.

'Well, she owed her shoemaker three hundred francs, and was giving a dinner and a party no further back than the day before yesterday. Mme. Mahuchet, hearing of this from the cook, came to me about it, and we got

excited over the news. She was for making a fuss, but for my own part—"My dear Mother Mahuchet," I said, "where is the use of it? Just to get a bad name; it is better to get good security. It is diamond cut diamond, and you save your bile."—But go she would; she asked me to back her up, and we went together.—"Madame is not at home."—"Go on!" said Mother Mahuchet. "We will wait for her if I stop here till midnight!"—So we camped down in the antechamber and chatted together. Well, doors opened and shut; by and by there was a sound of little footsteps and low voices; and, for my own part, I felt sorry. The company was coming to dinner. You can judge of the turn things took.

'The Countess sent in her own woman to wheedle la Mahuchet—"You shall be paid to-morrow"—and all the rest of the ways of trying it on.—No go.—Then the Countess, in her Sunday best, as you may say, comes into the dining-room. La Mahuchet hears her, flings open the door, and walks in. Lord! at the sight of the dinner-table, all sparkling like a jewel-case, the dish-covers and the plate and the candle-sconces, she went off like a soda-water bottle. She flings out her bomb—"Those that spend other people's money have no business to give dinner-parties; they ought to live quietly. You a Countess! and you owe a hundred crowns to a poor shoemaker's wife with seven children!"—You can imagine how she ran on, an uneducated woman as she is. At the first word of excuse—"No money"—from the Countess, la Mahuchet cries out, "Eh! my lady, but there is silver-plate here! Pawn your spoons and forks and pay me!"—"Take them yourself," says the Countess, catching up half-a-dozen and slipping them into her hand, and we hurried away downstairs pellmell.—What a success! Bah! no. Out in the street tears came into la Mahuchet's eyes, she is a good soul; she took the things back, and

apologised. She found out the depths of the Countess's poverty—they were German silver!'

'Dishcovered that she had no cover,' commented Léon de Lora, in whom the Mistigris of old was apt to reappear.

The pun flashed a sudden light across Mme. Nourrisson's brain. 'Aha! my dear sir, you are an artist, a dramatic writer, you live in the Rue du Helder, you have kept company with Madame Antonia, I know a few of your little ways! . . . Come, now, do you want something out of the common in the grand style, Carabine or Mousqueton, for instance, or Malaga or Jenny Cadine?'

'Malaga and Carabine, forsooth! when we have made them what they are!' cried Léon.

'My dear Mme. Nourrisson, I solemnly swear to you that we wanted nothing but the pleasure of making your acquaintance; and as we wish to hear about your antecedents, we should like to know how you came to drop into your way of business,' said Bixiou.

'I was a confidential servant in the household of a Marshal of France,' she said, posing like a Dorine; 'he was the Prince d'Ysembourg. One morning one of the finest ladies at the Emperor's court came to speak privately with the Marshal. I took care at once to be within hearing. Well, my Countess bursts into tears, and tells that simpleton of a Marshal (the Prince d'Ysembourg, the Condé of the Republic, and a simpleton to boot), she tells him that her husband was away at the wars in Spain, and had left her without a single note for a thousand francs, and that unless she can have one or two at once, her children must starve, she had literally nothing for to-morrow. Well, my Marshal, being tolerably free-handed in those days, takes a couple of thousand-franc notes out of his desk.—I watched the fair Countess down the stairs. She did not see me; she was laughing to herself with not altogether motherly glee,

so I slipped out and heard her tell the *chasseur* in a low voice to drive to Leroy's. I rushed round. My mother of a family goes to the famous shop in the Rue de Richelieu—you know the place—and orders and pays for a dress that cost fifteen hundred francs. You used to pay for one dress by ordering another then. Two nights afterwards she could appear at an ambassador's ball, decked out as a woman must be when she wishes to shine for all the world and for one besides. That very day said I to myself, "Here is an opening for me! When I am no longer young, I will lend money to fine ladies on their things; passion cannot reckon, and pays blindly." If it is a subject for a comedy that you want, I will let you have some for a consideration——'

And making an end of a harangue, coloured by all the phases of her past life, she departed, leaving Gazonal in dismay, caused partly by the matter of her discourse, but at least as much by an exhibition of five yellow teeth which she meant for a smile.

'What are we to do next?' he inquired.

'Find some banknotes,' said Bixiou, whistling for his porter; 'I want money, and I am going to teach you the uses of a porter. You imagine that they are meant to open doors; whereas their real use is to help vagrants like me out of difficulties, and to assist the artists whom they take under their protection, for which reason mine will take the Montyon prize some of these days.'

The common expression, 'eyes like saucers,' found sufficient illustration in Gazonal's countenance at that moment.

The man that suddenly appeared in the doorway was of no particular age, a something between a private detective and a merchant's clerk, but more unctuous and sleeker than either; his hair was greasy, his person paunchy, his complexion of the moist and unwholesome kind that you observe in the superiors of convents.

He wore a blue cloth jacket, drab trousers, and list slippers.

'What do you want, sir?' inquired this personage, with a half-patronising, half-servile manner.

'Oh, Ravenouillet—(his name is Ravenouillet,' said Bixiou, turning to Gazonal)—'have you your "bills receivable" about you?'

Ravenouillet felt in a side-pocket, and produced the stickiest book that Gazonal had ever seen in his life.

'Just enter a note of these two bills for five hundred francs at three months, and put your name to them for me.'

Bixiou brought out a couple of notes made payable to his order as he spoke. Ravenouillet accepted them forthwith, and noted them down on the greasy page among his wife's entries of various sums due from other lodgers.

'Thanks, Ravenouillet. Stay, here is an order for the Vaudeville.'

'Ah, my child will enjoy herself very much to-night,' said Ravenouillet, as he went away.

'There are seventy-one of us in the house,' said Bixiou, 'among us, on an average, we owe Ravenouillet six thousand francs per month, eighteen thousand francs per quarter for advances and postage, to say nothing of rent. He is our Providence—at thirty per cent. We pay him that without being so much as asked.'

'Oh, Paris! Paris!' exclaimed Gazonal.

'On the way,' said Bixiou, filling in his signature '(for I am going to show you another actor, Cousin Gazonal, and a charming scene he shall play, *gratis*, for you)——'

'Where?' Gazonal broke in.

'In a money-lender's office. On the way, I repeat, I will tell you how friend Ravenouillet started in Paris.'

As they passed the door of the lodge, Gazonal heard Mlle. Lucienne Ravenouillet, a student at the Conserva-

toire, practising her scales, her father was reading the newspaper, and Mme. Ravenouillet came out with letters in her hand for the lodgers above.

'Thank you, M. Bixiou,' called the little one.

'That is not a "rat,"' said Léon; 'it is a grasshopper in the larva state.'

'It seems that here, as all the world over, you win the favour of those in office by good offices,' began Gazonal. Léon was charmed with the pun.

'He is coming on in our society!' he cried.

'Now for Ravenouillet's history,' said Bixiou, when the three stood outside on the boulevard. 'In 1831, Massol (your chairman of committee, Gazonal) was a journalist barrister. At that time he merely intended to be Keeper of the Seals some day; he scorned to oust Louis-Philippe from the throne: pardon his ambition, he comes from Carcassonne. One fine morning a young fellow-countryman turned up.—"*Monsu* Massol," he said, "you know me very well, my father is your neighbour the grocer; I have just come from down yonder, for they tell us that every one who comes here gets a place." At those words a cold shiver ran through Massol. He thought within himself that if he were so ill advised as to oblige a compatriot, who for that matter was a perfect stranger, he should have the whole department tumbling in upon him. He thought of the wear and tear to bell-pulls, door hinges, and carpets, he saw his only servant giving notice, he had visions of trouble with his landlord, of complaints from the other tenants of the combined odours of garlic and *diligence* introduced into the house. So he fixed upon his petitioner such an eye as a butcher turns upon a sheep brought into the shambles. In vain. His fellow countryman survived that gaze, or rather that stab, and continued his discourse much on this wise, according to Massol's report of it:—

'"I have my ambitions, like every one else," said he;

"I shall not go back again until I am rich, if indeed I go back at all, for Paris is the ante-chamber of Paradise. They tell me that you write for the newspapers, and do anything you like with people here, and that for you it is ask and have with the Government. I have abilities, like all of us down yonder, but I know myself: I have no education; I cannot write (which is a pity, for I have ideas); so I do not think of coming into competition with you; I know myself; I should not make anything out. But since you can do anything, and we are brothers, as you may say, having played together as children, I count upon you to give me a start in life, and to use your influence for me.—Oh, you must. I want a place, the kind of place to suit my talents, a place that I, being I, am fitted to fill with a chance of making my fortune——"

'Massol was just on the point of brutally thrusting his fellow-countryman out at the door with a rough word in his ear, when the said countryman concluded thus:—

'"So I do not ask for a place in the civil service, where a man gets on as slowly as a tortoise, for there is your cousin that has been a tax-collector these twenty years, and is a tax-collector still—no; I simply thought of going——?"—"On the stage?" put in Massol, greatly relieved by the turn things were taking.—"No. It is true, I have the figure for it, and the memory, and the gesticulation; but it takes too much out of you. I should prefer the career of a—porter." Massol kept his countenance—"It will take far more out of you," he said, "but you are not so likely, at any rate, to perform to an empty house."—So he found Ravenouillet's "first-door-string" for him, as he says.'

'I was the first to take an interest in porters as a class,' said Léon. 'Your moral humbugs, your charlatans from vanity, your latter-day sycophants, your Septembrists disguised in trappings of decorous solemnity, your discoverers of problems palpitating with

present importance, are all preaching the emancipation of the negro, the improvement of the juvenile offender, and philanthropic efforts on behalf of the ticket-of-leave man; while they leave their porters in a worse plight than the Irish, living in dens more loathsome than dark cells, upon a scantier pittance than the Government grant per head for convicts. I have done but one good deed in my life, and that is my porter's lodge.'

'Yes,' said Bixiou. 'Suppose that a man has built a set of huge cages, divided up like a beehive or a menagerie, into hundreds of cells or dens, in which living creatures of every species are intended to ply their various industries; suppose that this animal, with the face of an owner of house-property, should come to a man of science and say—"Sir, I want a specimen of the order *Bimana*, which shall live in a sink ten feet square, filled with old boots and plague-stricken rags. I want him to live in it all his life, and rear a family of children as pretty as cherubs; he must use it as a workshop, kitchen, and promenade; he must sing and grow flowers in it, and never go out; he must shut his eyes, and yet see everything that goes on in the house."—Assuredly the man of science could not invent the Porter; Paris alone, or the Devil if you like to have it so, was equal to the feat.'

'Parisian industrialism has gone even further into the regions of the Impossible,' added Gazonal. 'You in Paris exhibit all kinds of manufactures; but there are by-products of which you know nothing. . . . There are your working classes.—They bear the brunt of competition with foreign industries, hardship against hardship, just as the regiments bore the brunt of Napoleon's duel with Europe.'

'Here we are. This is where our friend Vauvinet lives,' said Bixiou. 'People who paint contemporary manners are too apt to copy old portraits; it is one of

their greatest mistakes. In our own times every calling has been transformed. Tradesmen are peers of France, artists are capitalists, writers of vaudevilles have money in the funds. Some few figures remain as before ; but, generally speaking, most professions have dropped their manners and customs along with their distinctive dress. Gobseck, Gigonnet, Chaboisseau, and Samanon were the last of the Romans ; to-day we rejoice in the possession of our Vauvinet, the good fellow, the dandy-denizen of the greenroom, the frequenter of the society of *lorettes*, the owner of a neat little one-horse brougham. Watch my man carefully, friend Gazonal, and you shall see a comedy of money. First, the cool, indifferent man that will not give a penny ; and second, the hot and eager man smelling a profit. Of all things, listen to him.'

With that, the three mounted to a second-floor lodging in a very fine house on the Boulevard des Italiens, and at once found themselves amid elegant surroundings in the height of the fashion. A young man of eight-and-twenty, or thereabouts, came forward almost laughingly at sight of Léon de Lora, held out a hand to all appearance in the friendliest possible way to Bixiou, gave Gazonal a distant bow, and brought the three into his private office. All the man's bourgeois tastes lurked beneath the artistic decorations of the room in spite of the unimpeachable statuettes and numberless trifles appropriated to the uses of *petits appartements* by modern art, grown petty to supply the demand. Like most young men of business, Vauvinet was extremely carefully dressed, a man's clothes being as it were a kind of prospectus among them.

'I have come to you for money,' said Bixiou, laughing as he held out his bills.

Vauvinet's countenance immediately grew so grave that Gazonal was amused at the difference between the smiles of a minute ago and the professional bill-discounting visage he turned on Bixiou.

'I would oblige you with the greatest pleasure, my dear fellow,' said he, 'but I have no cash at the moment.'

'Oh, pshaw!'

'No. I have paid it all away, you know where. Poor old Lousteau is going to run a theatre. He has gone into partnership with an ancient playwright that stands very well with the ministry—Ridal, his name is—they wanted thirty thousand francs of me yesterday. I am drained dry, so dry indeed that I am just about to borrow a hundred louis of Cérizet to pay for my losses this morning at lansquenet, at Jenny Cadine's.'

'You must be drained dry indeed if you cannot oblige poor Bixiou,' put in Léon de Lora, 'for he can say very nasty things when he is driven to it——'

'I can only speak well of a man so well off,' said Bixiou.

'My dear fellow, even if I had the money, it would be quite impossible to discount bills accepted by your porter, even at fifty per cent. There is no demand for Ravenouillet's paper. He is not exactly Rothschild. I warn you that this sort of thing is played out. You ought to try another firm. Look up an uncle, for the friend that will back your bills is extinct, materialism is so frightfully on the increase——'

Bixiou turned to Gazonal.

'I have a friend here,' he said, 'one of the best known cloth manufacturers in the South. His name is Gazonal. His hair wants cutting,' continued Bixiou, surveying the provincial's luxuriant and somewhat dishevelled crop, 'but I am just about to take him to Marius, and his resemblance to a poodle, so deleterious to his credit and ours, will presently disappear.'

'A Southern name is not good enough for me, without offence to this gentleman be it said,' returned Vauvinet, and Gazonal was so much relieved that he passed over the insolence of the remark. Being extremely acute, he thought that Bixiou and the painter meant to

make him pay a thousand francs for the breakfast at the Café de Paris by way of teaching him to know the town. He had not yet got rid of the suspicion in which the provincial always intrenches himself.

'How should I do business in the Pyrenees, six hundred miles away?' added Vauvinet.

'So there is no more to be said?' returned Bixiou.

'I have twenty francs at home.'

'I am sorry for you,' said the author of the hoax. 'I thought I was worth a thousand francs,' he added drily.

'You are worth a hundred thousand francs,' Vauvinet rejoined; 'sometimes you are even beyond all price—but I am drained dry.'

'Oh, well, we will say no more about it. I had contrived as good a bit of business as you could wish at Carabine's to-night—do you know?'

Vauvinet's answer was a wink. So does one dealer in horse-flesh convey to another the information that he is not to be deceived.

'You have forgotten how you took me by the waist, exactly as if I were a pretty woman, and said with coaxing words and looks, "I will do anything for you, if only you will get me shares at par in this railway that du Tillet and Nucingen are bringing out," said you. Very well, my dear fellow, Maxime and Nucingen are coming to-night to meet several political folk at Carabine's. You are losing a fine chance, old man. Come. Good-day, dabbler.'

And Bixiou rose to go, leaving Vauvinet to all appearance indifferent, but in reality as vexed as a man can be with himself after a blunder of his own making.

'One moment, my dear fellow. I have credit if I have no cash. If I can get nothing for your bills, I can keep them till they fall due, and give you other bills in exchange from my portfolio. After all, we might possibly come to an understanding about those railway

shares; we could divide the profits in a certain proportion, and I would give you a draft on myself on account of the prof——'

'No, no,' returned Bixiou, 'I must have money; I must cash my Ravenouillet elsewhere——'

'And Ravenouillet is a good man,' resumed Vauvinet; 'he has an account at the savings bank; a very good man——'

'Better than you are,' said Léon; 'he has no rent to pay, he does not squander his money on *lorettes*, nor does he rush into speculation and shake in his shoes with every rise and fall.'

'You are pleased to laugh, great man. You have given us the quintessence of La Fontaine's fable of the *Oak and the Reed*,' said Vauvinet, grown jovial and insinuating all at once.—'Come, Gubetta, my old fellow conspirator,' he continued, taking Bixiou by the waist, 'you want money, do you? Very well, I may just as well borrow three as two thousand francs of my friend Cérizet. And "Cinna, let us be friends!" . . . Hand us over those two leaves that grow from the root of all evil. If I refused at first, it was because it is very hard on a man that can only do his bit of business by passing on bills to the Bank to make him keep your Ravenouillets locked up in the drawer of his desk. It is hard; very hard——'

'What discount?'

'Next to nothing,' said Vauvinet. 'At three months it will cost you a miserable fifty francs.'

'You shall be my benefactor, as Emile Blondet used to say.'

'It is borrowing money at twenty per cent. per annum, interest included——' Gazonal began in a whisper, but for all answer he received a blow from Bixiou's elbow directed at his windpipe.

'I say,' said Vauvinet, opening a drawer, 'I perceive an odd note for five hundred francs sticking to the

cloth. I did not know I was so rich. I was looking for a bill to offer you. I have one almost due for four hundred and fifty. Cérizet will take it off you for a trifle; and that makes up the amount. But no tricks, Bixiou. I am going to Carabine's to-night, eh? Will you swear——?'

'Are we not friends again?' asked Bixiou, taking the banknote and the bill. 'I give you my word of honour that you shall meet du Tillet to-night and plenty of others that have a mind to make their (rail)way.'

Vauvinet came out upon the landing with the three friends, cajoling Bixiou to the last.

Bixiou listened with much seriousness while Gazonal on the way downstairs tried to open his eyes to the nature of the transaction just completed. Gazonal proved to him that if Cérizet, this crony of Vauvinet's, charged no more than twenty francs for discounting a bill for four hundred and fifty francs, then he (Bixiou) was borrowing money at the rate of forty per cent. per annum.

Out upon the pavement Bixiou burst into a laugh, the laugh of a Parisian over a successful hoax, a soundless, joyless chuckle, a labial north-easter which froze Gazonal into silence.

'The grant of the concession to the railway will be postponed at the Chamber,' he said; 'we knew that yesterday from the *marcheuse* whom we met just now. And if I win five or six thousand francs at lansquenet, what is a loss of sixty or seventy francs so long as you have something to stake?'

'Lansquenet is another of the thousand facets of Paris life to-day,' said Léon. 'Wherefore, cousin, count upon our introducing you to one of the duchesses of the Rue Saint Georges. In her house you see the aristocracy of lorettes, and may perhaps gain your lawsuit. But you cannot possibly show yourself with that Pyrenean crop, you look like a hedgehog; we will take you to Marius,

close by in the Place de la Bourse. He is another of our mummers.'

'What is the new mummer?'

'Here comes the anecdote,' said Bixiou. 'In 1800 a young wigmaker named Cabot came from Toulouse, and set up shop (to use your jargon) in Paris. This genius—he retired afterwards with an income of twenty thousand francs to Libourne—this genius, consumed with ambition, saw that the name of Cabot could never be famous. M. Parny, whom he attended professionally, called him Marius, a name infinitely superior to the "Armands" and "Hippolytes" beneath which other victims of that hereditary complaint endeavour to conceal the patronymic. All Cabot's successors have been named Marius. The present Marius is Marius v.; his family name is Mougin. This is the way with many trades, with *Eau de Botot* for example, and La Petite-Vertu's ink. In Paris a man's name becomes a part of the business, and at length confers a certain status; the signboard ennobles. Marius left pupils behind him, too, and created (it is said) the first school of hair-dressing in the world.'

'I noticed before this as I travelled across France a great many names upon signboards—So-and-so, *from Marius*.'

'All his pupils are bound to wash their hands after each customer,' continued Bixiou; 'and Marius will not take every one, a pupil must have a shapely hand and tolerable good looks. The most remarkable of these, for figure or eloquence, are sent out to people's houses; Marius only puts himself about for titled ladies. He has a cab and a "groom."'

'But, after all, he is only a barber (*merlan*),' Gazonal cried indignantly.

'A barber!' repeated Bixiou. You must know that he is a captain in the National Guard, and wears the Cross because he was the first to leap a barricade in 1832.'

'Be careful. He is neither a hairdresser nor a wig-maker; he is the manager of *salons de coiffure*,' said Léon on the sumptuously carpeted staircase between the mahogany hand-rails and cut-glass balusters.

'And, look here, do not disgrace us,' added Bixiou. 'The lackeys in the ante-chamber will take off your coat and hat to brush them, open the door of the salon and close it after you. Which is worth knowing, my friend Gazonal,' Bixiou continued slyly, 'or you might cry "Thieves!"'

'The three salons are three boudoirs,' said Léon; 'the manager has filled them with all that modern luxury can devise. There are fringed lambrequins over the windows, flower-stands everywhere, and silken couches, on which you await your turn and read the newspapers if all the dressing-rooms are occupied. As you come in, you begin to finger your waistcoat pockets, and imagine that they will charge you five francs at least; but no pocket is mulcted of more than half a franc if the hair is curled, or a franc if the hairdresser cuts it. Elegant toilet-tables stand among the flowers, there are jets of water playing, you see yourself reflected everywhere in huge mirrors. So try to look as if you were used to it. When the client comes in (Marius uses the elegant term "client" instead of the common word "customer"), when the client appears on the threshold, Marius appraises him at a glance; for him you are "a head" more or less worthy of his interest. From Marius's point of view, there are no men—only heads.'

'We will tune Marius to concert-pitch for you,' said Bixiou, 'if you will follow our lead.'

When Gazonal appeared upon the scenes, Marius at once gave him an approving glance. 'Regulus!' cried he, 'take this head. Clip with the small shears first of all.'

At a sign from Bixiou, Gazonal turned to the pupil. 'Pardon me,' he said, 'I wish to have M. Marius himself.'

Greatly flattered by this speech, Marius came forward, leaving the head on which he was engaged.

'I am at your service, I am just at an end. Be quite easy, my pupil will prepare you, I myself will decide on the style.'

Marius, a little man, his face seamed with the small-pox, his hair frizzed after Rubini's fashion, was dressed in black from head to foot. He wore white cuffs and a diamond in his shirt-frill. He recognised Bixiou, and saluted him as an equal power.

'A commonplace head,' he remarked to Léon, indicating the subject under his fingers, 'a philistine. But what can one do? If one lived by art alone, one would end raving mad at Bicêtre.' And he returned to his client with an inimitable gesture and a parting injunction to Regulus, 'Be careful with that gentleman, he is evidently an artist.'

'A journalist,' said Bixiou.

At that word Marius passed the comb two or three times over the 'commonplace head,' swooped down upon Gazonal just as the small shears were brought into play, and caught Regulus by the arm with—

'I will take this gentleman.—Look, see yourself in the large mirror, sir (if the glass can stand it),' he said, addressing the relinquished philistine.—'Ossian!'

A lackey came in and carried off the 'client.'

'Pay at the desk, sir,' said Marius as the bewildered customer drew out his purse.

'Is it any use, my dear fellow, to proceed to this operation with the small shears?' asked Bixiou.

'A head never comes under my hands until it has been brushed,' said the great man; 'but on your account I will take this gentleman from beginning to end. The blocking out I leave to my pupils, I do not care to take it. Everybody, like you, is for "M. Marius himself"; I can only give the finishing touches. For what paper does monsieur write?'

'In your place I would have three or four editions of Marius.'

'Ah! monsieur is a feuilletoniste, I see,' said Marius. 'Unluckily, a hairdresser must do his work himself, it cannot be done by a deputy. . . . Pardon me.'

He left Gazonal to give an eye to Regulus, now engaged with a newly-arrived head, and made a disapproving comment thereon, an inarticulate sound produced by tongue and palate, which may be rendered thus—'titt, titt, titt.'

'Goodness gracious! come now, that is not broad enough, your scissors are leaving furrows behind them. . . . Stay a bit; look here, Regulus, you are not clipping poodles, but *men*—men with characters of their own; and if you continue to gaze at the ceiling instead of dividing your attention between the glass and the face, you will be a disgrace to "my house."'

'You are severe, M. Marius.'

'I must do my duty by them, and teach them the mysteries of the art——'

'Then it is an art, is it?'

Marius stopped in indignation, the scissors in one hand, the comb in the other, and contemplated Gazonal in the glass.

'Monsieur, you talk like a —— child. And yet, from your accent, you seem to come from the South, the land of men of genius.'

'Yes. It requires taste of a kind, I know,' returned Gazonal.

'Pray say no more, monsieur! I looked for better things from you. I mean to say that a hairdresser (I do not say a *good* hairdresser, for one is either a hairdresser or one is not), a hairdresser is not so easily found as—what shall I say?—as—I really hardly know—as a Minister—(sit still) no, that will not do, for you cannot judge of the value of a Minister, the streets are full of them.—A Paganini?—no, that will not quite do.—A

hairdresser, monsieur, a man that can read your character and your habits, must have that in him which makes a philosopher. And for the women! But there, women appreciate us, they know our value; they know that their truimphs are due to us when they come to us to prepare them for conquest . . . which is to say that a hairdresser is—but no one knows what he is. I myself, for instance, you will scarcely find a—well, without boasting, people know what I am. Ah! well, no, I think there should be a better yet. . . . Execution, that is the thing! Ah, if women would but give me a free hand; if I could but carry out all the ideas that occur to me!—for I have a tremendous imagination, you see —but women will not co-operate with you, they have notions of their own, they *will* run their fingers or their combs through the exquisite creations that ought to be engraved and recorded, for our works only live for a few hours, you see, sir! Ah! a great hairdresser should be something like what Carême and Vestris are in their lines.—(Your head this way, if you please, I am catching the expression. That will do.)—Bunglers, incapable of understanding their epoch or their art, are the ruin of our profession.—They deal in wigs, for instance, or hair-restorers, and think of nothing but selling you a bottle of stuff, making a trade of the profession; it makes one sorry to see it. The wretches cut your hair and brush it anyhow. Now, when I came here from Toulouse, it was my ambition to succeed to the great Marius, to be a true Marius, and in my person to add such lustre to the name as it had not known with the other four. "Victory or death!" said I to myself. (Sit up, I have nearly finished.) I was the first to aim at elegance. My salons excited curiosity. I scorn advertisements; I spend the cost of advertisements on comfort, monsieur, on improvements. Next year I shall have a quartette in a little salon; I shall have music, and the best music. Yes, one must beguile the

tedium of the time spent in the dressing-room. I do not shut my eyes to the unpleasant aspects of the operation. (Look at yourself.) A visit to the hairdresser is perhaps quite as tiring as sitting for a portrait. Monsieur knows the famous M. de Humboldt? (I managed to make the most of the little hair that America spared to him, for science has this much in common with the savage—she is sure to scalp her man.) Well, the great man said, as monsieur perhaps knows, that if it was painful to go to be hanged, it was only less painful to sit for your portrait. I myself am of the opinion of a good many women, that a visit to the hairdresser is more trying than a visit to the studio. Well, monsieur, I want people to come here for pleasure. (You have a rebellious tuft of hair.) A Jew suggested Italian opera-singers to pluck out the grey hairs of young fellows of forty in the intervals; but his signoras turned out to be young persons from the Conservatoire, or pianoforte teachers from the Rue Montmartre.—Now, monsieur, your hair is worthy of a man of talent.—Ossian!' (to the lackey in livery) 'brush this gentleman's coat, and go to the door with him.—Who comes next?' he added majestically, glancing round a group of customers waiting for their turn.

'Do not laugh, Gazonal,' said Léon as they reached the foot of the stairs. 'I can see one of our great men down yonder,' he continued, exploring the Place de la Bourse with his eyes. 'You shall have an opportunity of making a comparison; when you have heard him talk, you shall tell me which is the queerer of the two—he or the hairdresser.'

'"Do not laugh, Gazonal,"' added Bixiou, imitating Léon's manner. 'What is Marius's business, do you think?'

'He is a hairdresser.'

'He has gradually made a monopoly of the wholesale trade in human hair, just as the provision dealer of whom

we shall shortly buy a Strasbourg pie for three francs has the truffle trade entirely in his hands. He discounts bills in his line of business, he lends money to customers at a pinch, he deals in annuities, he speculates on 'Change, he is a shareholder in all the fashion papers; and finally, under the name of a chemist, he sells an abominable drug which brings him in thirty thousand francs per annum as his share of the profits, and costs a hundred thousand francs in advertisements.'

'Is it possible?'

'Bear this in mind,' Bixiou replied with gravity, 'in Paris there is no such thing as a small trade; everything here is done on a large scale, be it frippery or matches. The barkeeper standing with a napkin under his arm to watch you enter his shop very likely has an income of fifty thousand francs from investments in the funds. The waiter has a vote, and may offer himself for election; a man whom you might take for a beggar in the street carries a hundred thousand francs' worth of unmounted diamonds in his waistcoat pocket, and does not steal them.'

The three, inseparable for that day at least, were piloted by Léon de Lora in such sort that at the corner of the Rue Vivienne they ran against a man of forty or thereabouts with a ribbon in his buttonhole.

'My dear Dubourdieu, what are you dreaming about? Some beautiful allegorical composition?' asked Léon.—'My dear cousin, I have the pleasure of introducing you to the well-known painter Dubourdieu, celebrated no less for his genius than for his humanitarian convictions.—Dubourdieu, my cousin Palafox!'

Dubourdieu, a pallid little man with melancholy blue eyes, nodded slightly while Gazonal bowed low to the man of genius.

'So you have nominated Stidmann instead of——'

'How could I help it! I was away,' returned Léon de Lora.

'You are lowering the standard of the Académie,' resumed the painter. 'To think of choosing such a man as that! I do not wish to say any harm of him, but he really is a craftsman. . . . What is to become of the first and most permanent of all the arts, of sculpture that reveals the life of a nation when everything else, even the memory of its existence, has passed away—of sculpture that sets the seal of eternity upon the great man? The sculptor's office is sacred. He sums up the thought of his age, and you, forsooth, fill the ranks of the priesthood by taking in a bungling mantelpiece maker, a designer of drawing-room ornaments, one of those that buy and sell in the Temple! Ah! as Chamfort said, "If you are to endure life in Paris, you must begin by swallowing a viper every morning. . . ." After all, Art remains to us; no one can prevent us from cultivating Art.'

'And besides, my dear fellow, you have a consolation which few among artists possess—the future is yours,' put in Bixiou. 'When every one is converted to our doctrine, you will be the foremost man in your art, for the ideas which you put into your work will be comprehensible to all—when they are common property. In fifty years' time you will be for the world at large what you are now for us—a great man. It is only a question of holding out till then.'

The artist's face smoothed itself out, after the wont of mortal man when flattered on his weak side. 'I have just finished an allegorical figure of Harmony,' he said. 'If you care to come to see it, you will understand at once how I managed to put two years' work into it. It is all there. At a glance you see the Destiny of the Globe. She is a queen holding a bishop's crozier, the symbol of the aggrandisement of races useful to man; on her head she wears the cap of Liberty, and after the Egyptian fashion (the ancient Egyptians seem to have had foreshadowings of Fourier) she has six breasts. Her

feet rest upon two clasped hands, which enclose the globe between them, to signify the brotherhood of man; beneath her lie broken fragments of cannon, because all war is abolished, and I have tried to give her the serenity of Agriculture triumphant. At her feet, besides, I have put an enormous Savoy cabbage, the Master's symbol of Concord. Oh, it is not Fourier's least claim to our veneration that he revived the association of plants and ideas; every detail in creation is linked to the rest by its significance as a part of a whole, and no less by its special language. In a hundred years' time the globe will be much larger than it is now——'

'And how will that come to pass?' inquired Gazonal, amazed to hear a man outside a lunatic asylum talking in this way.

'By the increase of production. If people make up their minds to apply the System, it should react upon the stars; it is not impossible——'

'And in that case what will become of painting?' asked Gazonal.

'Painting will be greater than ever.'

'And will our eyes be larger?' continued Gazonal, looking significantly at his friends.

'Man will be once more as in the days before his degradation; our six-foot men will be dwarfs when that time comes——'

'How about your picture,' interrupted Léon; 'is it finished?'

'Quite finished,' said Dubourdieu. 'I tried to see Hiclar about a symphony. I should like those who see the picture to hear music in Beethoven's manner at the same time; the music would develop the ideas, which would thus reach the intelligence through the avenues of sight and sound. Ah! if the Government would only lend me one of the halls in the Louvre——'

'But I will mention it if you like. Nothing that can strike people's minds should be left undone.'

'Oh! my friends are preparing articles, but I am afraid that they may go too far.'

'Pshaw!' said Bixiou, they will go nothing like as far as the Future——'

Dubourdieu eyed Bixiou askance and went on his way.

'Why, the man is a lunatic,' said Gazonal, 'moon-struck and mad.'

'He has technical skill and knowledge,' said Léon, 'but Fourier has been the ruin of him. You have just seen one way in which ambition affects an artist. Too often here in Paris, in his desire to reach fame (which for an artist means fortune) by some short cut, he will borrow wings of circumstance; he will think to increase his stature by identifying himself with some Cause, or advocating some system, hoping in time to widen his coterie into a public. Such an one sets up to be a Republican, such another a Saint-Simonian, an aristocrat or a Catholic, or he is for the *juste milieu*, or the Middle Ages, or for Germany. But while opinions cannot give talent, they inevitably spoil it; witness this unfortunate being whom you have just seen. An artist's opinion ought to be a faith in works; and his one way to success is to work while Nature gives him the sacred fire.'

'Let us fly, Léon is moralising,' said Bixiou.'

'And did the man seriously mean what he said?' cried Gazonal; he had not yet recovered from his amazement.

'Very seriously,' replied Bixiou; 'he was quite as much in earnest as the king of hairdressers just now.'

'He is crazy,' said Gazonal.

'He is not the only man driven crazy by Fourier's notions,' returned Bixiou. 'You know nothing of Paris. Ask for a hundred thousand francs to carry out some idea most likely to be useful to the species (to try a steam-engine, for instance), you will die like Salomon de Caus at Bicêtre; but when it comes to a paradox,

any one will be cut in pieces for it—he and his fortune. Well, here it is with systems as with practical matters. Impossible newspapers have consumed millions of francs in the last fifteen years. The very fact that you are in the right of it makes your lawsuit so difficult to win; taken together with the other fact that your prefect has his own private ends to gain, as you say.'

'Can you understand how a clever man can live anywhere but in Paris when once he knows the psychology of the city?' asked Léon.

'Suppose that we take Gazonal to Mother Fontaine,' suggested Bixiou, beckoning a hackney cab, 'it would be a transition from the severe to the fantastic.—Drive to the Rue Vieille-du-Temple,' he called to the man, and the three drove away in the direction of the Marais.

'What are you taking me to see?'

'Ocular demonstration of Bixiou's remarks,' said Léon; 'you are to be shown a woman who makes twenty thousand francs per annum by exploiting an idea.'

'A fortune-teller,' explained Bixiou, construing Gazonal's expression as a question. 'Among folk that wish to know the future, Mme. Fontaine is held to be even wiser than the late Mlle. Lenormand.'

'She must be very rich!'

'She has fallen a victim to her idea since lotteries came into existence. In Paris, you see, great receipts always mean a large expenditure. Every hard head has a crack in it somewhere, like a safety-valve, as it were, for the steam. Every one that makes a great deal of money has his weaknesses or his fancies, a provision of nature probably to keep the balance.'

'And now that lotteries are abolished?'

'Oh, well, she has a nephew, and is saving for him.'

Arrived in the Rue Vieille-du-Temple, the three friends entered one of the oldest houses in the street, and discovered a tremulous staircase, with wooden steps laid

on a foundation of concrete. Up they went in the perpetual twilight, through the fetid atmosphere peculiar to houses with a passage entry, till they reached the third story, and a door which can only be described by a drawing; any attempt to give an adequate idea of it in words would consume too much midnight oil.

An old crone, so much in keeping with the door that she might have been its living counterpart, admitted the three into a room which did duty as an antechamber, icy cold as a crypt, while the streets outside were sweltering in the heat. Puffs of damp air came up from an inner court, a sort of huge breathing-hole in the building; a box full of sickly-looking plants stood on the window-ledge. A grey daylight filled the room. Everything was glazed over with a greasy fuliginous deposit; the chairs and table, the whole room, in fact, was squalid; the damp oozed up through the brick floor like water through the sides of a Moorish jar. There was not a single detail which did not harmonise with the hook-nosed, pallid, repulsive old hag in the much-mended rags, who asked them to be seated, and informed them that MADAME never saw more than one person at a time.

Gazonal screwed up his courage and went boldly forwards.

The woman whom he confronted looked like one of those whom Death has forgotten, or more probably left as a copy of himself in the land of the living. Two grey eyes, so immovable that it tired you to look at them, glittered in a fleshless countenance on either side of a sunken, snuff-bedabbled nose. A set of knuckle-bones, firmly mounted with sinews almost like bone, made as though they were human hands, thrumming like a piece of machinery thrown out of gear upon a pack of cards. The body, a broomstick decently draped with a gown, enjoyed the advantages of still life to the full; it did not move a hair's-breadth. A black velvet cap rose

above the automaton's forehead. Mme. Fontaine, for she was really a woman, sat with a black fowl on her right hand, and a fat toad named Ashtaroth on her left. Gazonal did not notice the creature at first.

The toad, an animal of portentous size, was less alarming in himself than by reason of a couple of topazes, each as large as a fifty centime piece, that glowed like lamps in his head. Their gaze was intolerable. 'The toad is a mysterious creature,' as the late M. Lassailly used to say, after lying out in the fields to have the last word with a toad that fascinated him. Perhaps, all creation, man included, is summed up in the toad; for Lassailly tells us that it lives on almost indefinitely, and it is well known that, of all animals, its mating lasts the longest.

The black fowl's cage stood two feet away from a table covered with a green cloth; a plank like a drawbridge lay between.

When the woman, the least real of the strange company about a table worthy of Hoffmann, bade Gazonal 'Cut!'—the honest manufacturer shuddered in spite of himself. The secret of the formidable power of such creatures lies in the importance of the thing we seek to learn of them. Men and women come to buy hope of them; and they know it.

The sibyl's cave was a good deal darker than the antechamber, so much so, in fact, that you could not distinguish the colour of the wall-paper. The smoke-begrimed ceiling, so far from reflecting, seemed rather to absorb such feeble light as struggled in through a window blocked up with bleached sickly-looking plant-life; but all the dim daylight in the place fell full upon the table at which the sorceress sat. Her armchair and a chair for Gazonal completed the furniture of a little room cut in two by a garret, where Mme. Fontaine evidently slept. A little door stood ajar, and the murmur of a pot boiling on the fire reached Gazonal's ears. The sounds

from the kitchen, the compound of odours in which effluvia from the sink predominated, called up an incongruous association of ideas—the necessities of everyday life and the sense of the supernatural. Disgust was mingled with curiosity. Gazonal caught sight of the lowest step of the deal staircase which led to the garret; he saw all these particulars at a glance, and his gorge rose. The kind of terror inspired by similar scenes in romances and German plays was somehow so different; the absence of illusion, the prosaic sensation caught him by the throat. He felt heavy and dizzy in that atmosphere; the gloom set his nerves on edge. With the very coxcombry of courage, he turned his eyes on the toad, and with sickening sensation of heat in the pit of the stomach, felt a sort of panic such as a criminal might feel at sight of a policeman. Then he sought comfort in a scrutiny of Mme. Fontaine, and found a pair of colourless, almost white eyes, with intolerable unwavering black pupils. The silence grew positively appalling.

'What does monsieur wish?' asked Mme. Fontaine. 'His fortune for five francs, or ten francs, or the *grand jeu*?'

'Five francs is quite dear enough,' said the Provençal, making unspeakable efforts to fight against the influences of the place. But just as he strove for self-possession, a diabolical cackle made him start on his chair. The black hen emitted a sound.

'Go away, my girl. Monsieur only wishes to spend five francs.'

The hen seemed to understand, for when she stood within a step of the cards, she turned and walked solemnly back to her place.

'Which is your favourite flower?' asked the old crone, in a voice hoarse with the accumulation of phlegm in her throat.

'The rose.'

'Your favourite colour?'

'Blue.'

'What animal do you like best?'

'The horse. Why do you ask?' queried Gazonal in turn.

'Man is linked to other forms of life by his own previous existences,' she said sententiously, 'hence his instincts, and his instincts control his destiny.—Which kind of food do you like best; fish, game, grain, butcher meat, sweet things, fruit, or vegetables?'

'Game.'

'In what month were you born?'

'September.'

'Hold out your hand.'

Mme. Fontaine scanned the palm put forth for her inspection with close attention. All this was done in a business-like way, with no attempt to give a supernatural colour to the proceedings; a notary asking a client's wishes with regard to the drafting of a lease could not have been more straightforward. The cards being sufficiently shuffled, she asked Gazonal to cut and make them up into three packs. This done, she took up the packs, spread them out one above another, and eyed them as a gambler eyes the thirty-six numbers at roulette before he stakes his money.

Gazonal felt a cold chill freeze the marrow of his bones; he scarcely knew where he was; but his surprise grew more and more when this repulsive hag in the greasy, flabby green skull-cap, and false front that exhibited more black silk than hair curled into points of interrogation, began to tell him, in her rheumy voice, of all the events, even the most intimate history of his past life. She told him his tastes, his habits, his character, his ideas even as a child; she knew all that might have influenced his life. There was his projected marriage, for instance; she told him why and by whom it was broken off, giving him an exact description of the woman he had

loved; and finally she named his district, and told him about his lawsuit, and so on, and so on.

Gazonal thought at first that the whole thing was a hoax got up for his benefit by his cousin; but the absurdity of this theory struck him almost at once, and he sat in gaping astonishment. Opposite sat the infernal power incarnate, a power that, from among all human shapes, had borrowed that one which has struck the imagination of poets and painters throughout all time as the most appalling—a cold-blooded, shrunken, asthmatic, toothless hag, with hard lips, flat nose, and pale eyes. Nothing was alive about Mme. Fontaine's face save the eyes; some gleam from the depths of the future or the fires of hell sparkled in them.

Gazonal, scarcely knowing what he said, interrupted her to ask the uses of the fowl and the toad.

'To foretell the future. The "consultant" himself scatters some seeds over the cards; Cleopatra comes to pick them up; and Ashtaroth creeps over them to seek the food that the client gives him. Their wonderful intelligence is never deceived. Would you like to see them at work and hear your future read? It costs a hundred francs.'

But Gazonal, dismayed by Ashtaroth's expression, bade the terrible Mme. Fontaine good-day, and fled into the next room. He was damp with perspiration; he seemed to feel an unclean spirit brooding over him.

'Let us go out of this,' he said. 'Has either of you ever consulted this witch?'

'I never think of taking a step in life until Ashtaroth has given his opinion,' said Léon, 'and I am always the better for it.'

'I am still expecting the honest competence promised me by Cleopatra,' added Bixiou.

'I am in a fever!' cried the child of the South. 'If I believed all that you tell me, I should believe in witchcraft, in a supernatural power.'

'It can only be natural,' put in Bixiou. 'Half the artists alive, one-third of the lorettes, and one-fourth of the statesmen consult Mme. Fontaine. It is well known that she acts as Egeria to a certain statesman.'

'Did she tell you your fortune?' inquired Léon.

'No. I had quite enough of it with the past.' A sudden idea struck Gazonal. 'But if she and her disgusting collaborators can foretell the future,' he said, 'how is it that she is unlucky in the lottery?'

'Ah! there you have set your finger on one of the great mysteries of occult science,' answered Léon. 'So soon as the personal element dims the surface of that inward mirror, as it were, which reflects past and future, so soon as you introduce any motive foreign to the exercise of this power that they possess, the sorcerer or sorceress at once loses the power of vision. It is the same with the artist who systematically prostitutes art to gain advancement or alien ends; he loses his gift. Mme. Fontaine once had a rival, a man who told fortunes on the cards; he fell into criminal courses, yet he never foresaw his own arrest, conviction, and sentence. Mme. Fontaine is right eight times out of ten, yet she never could tell that she should lose her stake in the lottery.'

'It is the same with magnetism,' Bixiou remarked. 'A man cannot magnetise himself.'

'Good! Now comes magnetism. What next! Do you really know everything?'

'My friend Gazonal, before you can laugh at everything, you must know everything,' said Bixiou with gravity. 'For my own part, I have known Paris since I was a boy, and my pencil helps me to laugh for a livelihood at the rate of five caricatures per month. So I very often laugh at an idea in which I have faith.'

'Now, let us go in for something else,' said Léon. 'Let us drive to the Chamber and arrange the cousin's business.'

'This,' continued Bixiou, burlesquing Odry and

Gaillard, 'is High Comedy; we will draw out the first great speaker that we meet in the Salle des Pas Perdus; and there, as everywhere else, you shall hear the Parisian harping upon two eternal strings—Self-interest and Vanity.

As they stepped into the cab again, Léon noticed a man driving rapidly past, and signalled his wish to speak a word with the newcomer.

'It is Publicola Masson,' he told Bixiou; 'I will just ask him for an interview this evening at five o'clock when the House rises. The cousin shall see the queerest of all characters.'

'Who is it?' asked Gazonal, while Léon went across to speak to his man.

'A chiropodist, that will cut your corns by contract, an author of a treatise on chiropody. If the Republicans triumph for six months, he will without doubt have a place in history.'

'And does he keep a carriage?'

'No one but a millionaire can afford to go about on foot here, my friend.'

'The Chamber!' Léon called to the driver.

'Which, sir?'

'The Chamber of Deputies,' said Léon, exchanging a smile with Bixiou.

'Paris is beginning to confuse me,' sighed Gazonal.

'To show you its immensity—moral, political, and literary—we are copying the Roman cicerone that shows you a thumb of the statue of St. Peter, which you take for a life-size figure until you find out that a finger is more than a foot long. You have not so much as measured one of the toes of Paris yet——'

'And observe, cousin Gazonal, that we are taking things as they come, we are not selecting.'

'You shall have a Belshazzar's feast to-night; you shall see Paris, *our* Paris, playing at lansquenet, staking a hundred thousand francs without winking an eye.'

Fifteen minutes later their hackney cab set them down by the flight of steps before the Chamber of Deputies on that side of the Pont de la Concorde which leads to discord.

'I thought the Chambers were unapproachable,' said Gazonal, surprised to find himself in the great Salle des Pas Perdus.

'That depends,' said Bixiou. 'Physically speaking, it costs you thirty sous in cab hire; politically speaking, rather more. A poet says that the swallows think that the Arc de Triomphe de l'Étoile was built for them; and we artists believe that this public monument was built to console the failures on the stage of the Théâtre-Français and to amuse us; but these state-paid play-actors are more expensive than the others, and it is not every day that we get our money's worth.'

'So this is the Chamber! . . .' repeated Gazonal. He strode through the great hall, almost empty now, looking about him with an expression which Bixiou noted down in his memory for one of the famous caricatures in which he rivals Gavarni. Léon on his side walked up to one of the ushers who come and go constantly between the Salle des Séances itself and the lobby, where the reporters of the *Moniteur* are at work while the House is sitting, with some persons attached to the Chamber.

'The Minister is here,' the usher was telling Léon as Gazonal came up, 'but I do not know whether M. Giraud has gone or not; I will see——' He opened one of the folding doors through which no one is allowed to pass save deputies, ministers, or royal commissioners, when a man came out, young as yet, as it seemed to Gazonal, in spite of his forty-eight years. To this newcomer the usher pointed out Léon de Lora.

'Aha! you here!' he said, shaking hands with Léon and Bixiou. 'You rascals! what do you want in the innermost sanctuary of law?'

'Gad! we have come for a lesson in the art of

humbug,' said Bixiou. 'One gets rusty if one does not.'

'Then let us go out into the garden,' said the new-comer, not knowing that Gazonal was one of the company.

Gazonal was at a loss how to classify the well-dressed stranger in plain black from head to foot, with a ribbon and an order; but he followed to the terrace by the river once known as the Quai Napoléon. Out in the garden the *ci-devant* young man gave vent to a laugh, suppressed since his appearance in the Salle des Pas Perdus.

'Why, what is the matter with you?' asked Léon.

'My dear friend, we are driven to tell terrific lies with incredible coolness to prove the sincerity of the constitutional government. Now I myself have my moods. There are days when I can lie like a political programme, and others when I cannot keep my countenance. This is one of my hilarious days. Now the Opposition has called upon the chief secretary to disclose secrets of diplomacy which he would not impart if they were in office, and at this moment he is on his legs preparing to go through a gymnastic performance. And as he is an honest man that will not lie on his own account, he said confidentially to me before he mounted to the breach, "I have not a notion what to tell them." So, when I saw him there, an uncontrollable desire to laugh seized me, and I went out, for you cannot very well have your laugh out on the Ministerial benches, where my youth occasionally revisits me unseasonably.'

'At last!' cried Gazonal. 'At last! I have found an honest man in Paris. You must be indeed great!' he continued, looking at the stranger.

'I say, who is this gentleman?' inquired the other, scrutinising Gazonal as he spoke.

'A cousin of mine,' Léon put in hastily. 'I can answer for his silence and loyalty as for my own. We

have come here on his account; he has a lawsuit on hand, it depends on your department; his prefect simply wishes to ruin him, and we have come to see you about it and to prevent the Council of State from confirming injustice.'

'Who is the chairman?'

'Massol.'

'Good.'

'And our friends Claude Vignon and Giraud are on the committee,' added Bixiou.

'Just say a word to them, and let them come to Carabine's to-night,' said Léon. 'Du Tillet is giving a party, ostensibly a meeting of railway shareholders, for they rob you more than ever on the highways now.'

'But, I say, is this in the Pyrénées?' inquired the young-looking stranger, grown serious by this time.

'Yes,' said Gazonal.

'And you do not vote for us at the general election,' he continued, fixing his eyes on Gazonal.

'No; but the remarks you made just now have corrupted me. On the honour of a Commandant of the National Guard, I will see that your candidate is returned——'

'Very well. Can you further guarantee your cousin?' asked the young-looking man, addressing Léon.

'We are forming him,' said Bixiou, in a very comical tone.

'Well, I shall see,' said the other, and he hurried back to the Salle des Séances.

'I say, who is that?'

'The Comte de Rastignac; he is the head of the department in which your affair is going on.'

'A Minister! Is that all?'

'He is an old friend of ours as well, and he has three hundred thousand livres a year, and he is a peer of France, and the King has given him the title of Count.

He is Nucingen's son-in-law, and one of the two or three statesmen produced by the Revolution of July. Now and then, however, he finds office dull, and comes out to have a laugh with us.'

'But, look here, cousin, you did not tell us that you were on the other side down yonder,' said Léon, taking Gazonal by the arm. 'How stupid you are! One deputy more or less to the Right or Left, will you sleep any the softer for that?'

'We are on the side of the others——'

'Let them be,' said Bixiou—Monrose himself could not have spoken the words more comically—'let them be, they have Providence on their side, and Providence will look after them without your assistance and in spite of themselves.—A manufacturer is bound to be a necessarian.'

'Good! here comes Maxime with Canalis and Giraud,' cried Léon.

'Come, friend Gazonal; the promised actors are arriving on the scene.'

The three went towards the newcomers, who to all appearance were lounging on the terrace.

'Have they sent you about your business that you are doing like this?' inquired Bixiou, addressing Giraud.

'No. We have come out for a breath of air till the ballot is over.'

'And how did the chief secretary get out of it?'

'He was magnificent!' said Canalis.

'Magnificent!' from Giraud.

'Magnificent!' from Maxime.

'I say! Right, Left, and Centre all of one mind!'

'Each of us has a different idea in his head though,' Maxime de Trailles remarked. (Maxime was a Ministerialist.)

'Yes,' laughed Canalis. Canalis had once been in office, but he was now edging away towards the Right.

'You have just enjoyed a great triumph,' Maxime said, addressing Canalis, 'for you drove the Minister to reply.'

'Yes, and to lie like a charlatan,' returned Canalis.

'A glorious victory!' commented honest Giraud. 'What would you have done in his place?'

'I should have lied likewise.'

'Nobody calls it "lying,"' said Maxime; 'it is called "covering the Crown,"' and he drew Canalis a few paces aside.'

Léon turned to Giraud.

'Canalis is a very good speaker,' he said.

'Yes and no,' returned the State Councillor. 'He is an empty drum, an artist in words rather than a speaker. In short, 'tis a fine instrument, but it is not music, and therefore he has not had and never will have "the ear of the House." He thinks that France cannot do without him; but whatever happens, he cannot possibly be "the man of the situation."'

Canalis and Maxime rejoined the group just as Giraud, deputy of the Centre-Left, delivered himself of this verdict. Maxime took Giraud by the arm and drew him away, probably to give the same confidences that Canalis had received.

'What an honest, worthy fellow he is!' said Léon, indicating Giraud.

'That kind of honesty is the ruin of a government,' replied Canalis.

'Is he a good speaker in your opinion?'

'Yes and no,' said Canalis. 'He is wordy and prosy. He is a plodding reasoner, a good logician; but he does not comprehend the wider logic—the logic of events and of affairs—for which reason he has not and never will have "the ear of the House"——'

Canalis was in the midst of his summing-up when the subject of his remarks came towards them with Maxime; and, forgetting that there was a stranger present whose

discretion was not so certain as Léon's or Bixiou's, he took Canalis's hand significantly.

'Very good,' said he, 'I agree to M. le Comte de Trailles's proposals. I will ask the question, but it will be pressed hard.'

'Then we shall have the House with us on the question, for a man of your capacity and eloquence "always has the ear of the House,"' returned Canalis. 'I will undertake to crush you and no mistake.'

'You very likely will bring about a change of ministry, for on such ground you can do anything you like with the House, and you will be "the man of the situation"——'

'Maxime has hocussed them both,' said Léon, turning to his cousin. 'That fine fellow is as much at home in parliamentary intrigue as a fish in water.'

'Who is he?' asked Gazonal.

'He *was* a scamp; he *is* in a fair way to be an ambassador,' answered Bixiou.

'Giraud,' said Léon, 'do not go until you have asked Rastignac to say something, as he promised me he would, about a lawsuit that will come up for decision before you the day after to-morrow; it affects my cousin here. I will come round to-morrow morning to see you about it.' And the three friends followed the three politicians, at a certain distance, to the Salle des Pas Perdus.

'Now, cousin, look at the two yonder,' said Léon, pointing out a retired and very famous Minister and the leader of the Left Centre, 'those are two speakers that always "have the ear of the House"; they have been called in joke the leaders of His Majesty's Opposition; they have the ear of the House, so much so indeed that they very often pull it.'

'It is four o'clock. Let us go back to the Rue de Berlin,' said Bixiou.

'Yes. You have just seen the heart of the Govern-

ment ; now you ought to see the parasites and ascarides, the tapeworm, or, since one must call him by his name—the Republican.'

The friends were no sooner packed into their cab than Gazonal looked maliciously at his cousin and Bixiou; there was a pent-up flood of southern and splenetic oratory within him.

'I had my suspicions before of this great jade of a city,' he burst out in his thick southern accent, 'but after this morning I despise it. The poor country district, for so shabby as she is, is an honest girl ; but Paris is a prostitute, rapacious, deceitful, artificial, and I am very glad to escape with my skin——'

'The day is not over yet,' Bixiou said sententiously, with a wink at Léon.

'And why complain like a fool of a so-called prostitution by which you will gain your case ?' added Léon. 'Do you think yourself a better man, less hypocritical than we are, less rapacious, less ready to make a descent of any sort, less taken up with vanity than all those whom we have set dancing like marionettes ?'

'Try to tempt me.'

'Poor fellow !' shrugged Léon. 'Have you not promised your vote and influence, as it is, to Rastignac ?'

'Yes ; because he is the only one among them that laughed at himself.'

'Poor fellow !' echoed Bixiou. 'And you distrust *me* when I have done nothing but laugh ! You remind me of a cur snapping at a tiger.—Ah, if you had but seen us making game of somebody or other. Do you realise that we are capable of driving a sane man out of his wits ?'

At this point they reached Léon's house. The splendour of its furniture cut Gazonal short and put an end to the dispute. Rather later in the day it began to dawn upon him that Bixiou had been drawing *him* out.

At half-past five, Léon de Lora was dressing for the evening, to Gazonal's great bewilderment. He counted up his cousin's thousand-and-one superfluities, and admired the valet's seriousness, when 'monsieur's chiropodist' was announced, and Publicola Masson entered the room, bowed to Gazonal and Bixiou, set down a little case of instruments, and took a low chair opposite Léon. The newcomer, a little man of fifty, bore a certain resemblance to Marat.

'How are things going?' inquired Léon, holding out a foot, previously washed by the servant.

'Well, I am compelled to take a couple of pupils, two young fellows that have given up surgery in despair and taken to chiropody. They were starving, and yet they are not without brains——'

'Oh, I was not speaking of matters pedestrian; I was asking after your political programme——'

Masson's glance at Gazonal was more expressive than any spoken inquiry.

'Oh! speak out; that is my cousin, and he is all but one of you; he fancies that he is a Legitimist.'

'Oh, well, we are getting on; we are getting on. All Europe will be with us in five years' time. Switzerland and Italy are in full ferment, and we are ready for the opportunity if it comes. Here, for instance, we have fifty thousand armed men, to say nothing of two hundred thousand penniless citizens——'

'Pooh!' said Léon, 'how about the fortifications?'

'Pie crusts made to be broken,' Masson retorted. 'In the first place, we shall never allow artillery to come within range; and in the second, we have a little contrivance more effectual than all the fortifications in the world, an invention which we owe to the doctor who cured folk faster than all the rest of the faculty could kill them while his machine was in operation.'

'What a rate you are going!' said Gazonal. The sight of Publicola made his flesh creep.

'Oh, there is no help for it. We come after Robespierre and Saint-Just, to improve upon them. They were timid, and you see what came of it—an emperor, the elder branch and then the younger. The Mountain did not prune the social tree sufficiently.'

'Look here, you that will be consul, or tribune, or something like it, don't forget that I have asked for your protection any time these ten years,' said Bixiou.

'Nothing will happen to you. We shall need jesters, and you could take up Barère's job.'

'And I?' queried Léon.

'Oh, you are my client; that will save you; for genius is an odious privileged class that receives far too much here in France. We shall be forced to demolish a few of our great men to teach the rest the lesson that they must be simple citizens.'

This was said with a mixture of jest and earnest that sent a shudder through Gazonal.

'Then will there be an end of religion?' he asked.

'An end of a *State religion*,' said Masson, laying a stress on the two last words; 'every one will have his own belief. It is a very lucky thing that the Government just now is protecting the convents; they are accumulating the wealth for our Government. Everybody is conspiring to help us. For instance, all those who pity the people, and bawl so much over the proletariat and the wage-earning classes, or write against the Jesuits, or interest themselves in the amelioration of anybody whatsoever—communists, humanitarians, philanthropists, you understand,—all these folk are our advanced guard. While we lay in powder they are braiding the fuse, and the spark of circumstance will set fire to it.'

'Now, pray, what do you want for the welfare of the country?'

'Equality among the citizens, cheap commodities of every kind. There shall be no starving folk on one

hand no millionaires on the other; no blood-suckers, no victims—that is what we want.'

'Which is to say the *maximum* and the *minimum*?' queried Gazonal.

'You have said,' the other returned laconically.

'An end of manufacturers?'

'Manufactures will be carried on for the benefit of the State; we shall all have a life interest in France. Every man will have his rations served out as if he were on board ship, and everybody will do the work for which he is fitted.'

'Good. And meanwhile, until you can cut your aristocrats' heads off——'

'I pare their nails,' said the Republican-Radical, shutting up his case of instruments and finishing the joke himself. Then with a very polite bow he withdrew.

'Is it possible? In 1845?' cried Gazonal.

'If we had time we could show you all the characters of 1793; and you should talk with them. You have just seen Marat. Well, we know Fouquier-Tinville, Collot-d'Herbois, Robespierre, Chabot, Fouché, Barras, and even a magnificent Mme. Roland.'

'Ah, well, tragedy has not been left unrepresented on this stage,' said Gazonal.

'It is six o'clock. We will take you to see Odry in *Les Saltimbanques* this evening, but first we must call upon Mme. Cadine, an actress, very intimate with Massol your chairman; you must pay your court assiduously to her to-night.'

'As it is absolutely necessary that you should conciliate this power, I will just give you a few hints,' added Bixiou. 'Do you employ women in your factory?'

'Assuredly.'

'That was all that I wanted to know,' said Bixiou. 'You are not a married man, you are a great——'

'Yes,' interrupted Gazonal. 'You have guessed; women are my weak point.'

'Very good. If you decide to execute a little manœuvre which I will teach you, you shall know something of the charm of intimacy with an actress without spending one farthing.'

Bixiou, intent on playing a mischievous trick upon the cautious Gazonal, had scarcely finished tracing out his part for him, when they reached Mme. Cadine's house in the Rue de la Victoire. But a hint was enough for the southern brain, as will shortly be seen.

They climbed the stair of a tolerably fine house, and discovered Jenny Cadine finishing her dinner. She was to play in the second piece at the Gymnase. Gazonal introduced to the power, Léon and Bixiou went aside ostensibly to see a new piece of furniture, really to leave the two alone together; but not before Bixiou had whispered to her that 'this was Léon's cousin, a manufacturer worth millions of francs.—He wants to gain his lawsuit against the prefect in the Council of State,' he added, 'so he wishes to win you first, to have Massol on his side.'

All Paris knows Jenny Cadine's great beauty; no one can wonder, therefore, that Gazonal stood dumbfounded at sight of her. She had received him almost coldly at first, but during those few minutes that he spent alone with her she was very gracious to him. Gazonal looked contemptuously round at the drawing-room furniture through the door left ajar by his fellow-conspirators, and made a mental estimate of the contents of the dining-room.

'How any man can leave such a woman as you in such a dog-hole as this!——' he began.

'Ah! there it is. It cannot be helped. Massol is not rich. I am waiting until he is a Minister——'

'Happy man!' exclaimed Gazonal, heaving a sigh from the depths of a provincial heart.

'Good,' thought the actress, 'I shall have new furniture; I can rival Carabine now.'

Léon came in. 'Well, dear child,' he said, 'you are coming to Carabine's this evening, are you not? Supper and lansquenet.'

'Will monsieur be there?' Jenny asked artlessly and sweetly.

'Yes, madame,' said Gazonal, dazzled by his rapid success.

'But Massol will be there too,' rejoined Bixiou.

'Well, and what has that to do with it?' retorted Jenny. 'Now let us go, my treasures, I must be off to my theatre.'

Gazonal handed her down to the cab that was waiting for her at the door, and squeezed her hands so tenderly, that Jenny wrung her fingers.

'Eh!' she cried, 'I have not a second set.'

Once in the carriage, Gazonal tried to hug Bixiou. 'She is hooked!' he cried; 'you are a most unmitigated scoundrel!'

'So the women say,' returned Bixiou.

At half-past eleven, after the play, a hackney cab brought the trio to Mlle. Séraphine Sinet's abode. Every well-known lorette either takes a pseudonym, or somebody bestows one upon her, and Séraphine is better known as Carabine, possibly because she never fails to bring down her 'pigeon.' She had come to be almost indispensable to du Tillet the famous banker, and member of the Left Centre, and at that time she was living in charming rooms in the Rue Saint-Georges. There are certain houses in Paris that seem fated to carry on a tradition; this particular house had already seen seven reigns of courtesans. A stockbroker had installed Suzanne de Val-Noble in it somewhere about the year 1827. The notorious Esther had here driven the Baron de Nucingen to commit the only follies of his life. Here Florine, and she whom some facetiously call the

'*late* Madame Schontz,' had shone in turn, and finally when du Tillet tired of his wife he had taken the little modern house and established Carabine in it; her lively wit, her offhand manners, her brilliant shamelessness provided him with a counterpoise for the cares of life, domestic, public, and financial.

Ten covers were always laid; dinner was served (and splendidly) whether du Tillet and Carabine were at home or no. Artists, men of letters, journalists, and frequenters of the house dined there, and there was play of an evening. More than one member of the Chamber came hither to seek the pleasure that is paid for in Paris by its weight in gold. A few feminine eccentrics, certain falling stars of doubtful significance that sparkle in the Parisian firmament, appeared here in all the splendour of their toilettes. The conversation was good, for talk was unrestrained, and anything might be said and was said. Carabine, a rival of the no less celebrated Malaga, had fallen heir as it were to several salons; the coteries belonging to Florine (now Mme. Nathan), Tullia (afterwards Comtesse du Bruel), and Madame Schontz (who became the wife of President du Ronceret) had all rallied to Carabine.

Gazonal made but one remark as he came in, but his observation was both legitimate and Legitimist—'It is finer than the Tuileries,' said he; and, indeed, his provincial eyes found so much employment with satins, velvets, brocades, and gilding, that he did not see Jenny Cadine in a dress that commanded respect, hidden behind Carabine. She was taking mental notes of her litigant's entry while she chatted with her hostess.

'This is my cousin, my dear,' said Léon, addressing Carabine; 'he is a manufacturer; he dropped in upon me this morning from the Pyrénées. He knows nothing as yet of Paris; he wants Massol's help in a case that has gone up to the Council of State; so we have taken the liberty of bringing him here to supper, beseeching you

at the same time to leave him in full possession of his faculties——'

'As he pleases; wine is dear,' said Carabine, scanning the provincial, who struck her as in no wise remarkable.

As for Gazonal, dazzled by the women's dresses, the lights, the gilding, and the chatter of various groups, all concerned, as he supposed, with him and his affairs, he could only stammer out incoherent words.

'Madame—madame—you are—you are very kind.'

'What do you manufacture?' asked the mistress of the house, smiling at him.

'Say lace,' prompted Bixiou in a whisper, 'and offer her pillow-lace or guipures.'

'P-p-pill——'

'Pills!' said Carabine. 'I say, Cadine, child, you have been taken in.'

'Lace,' Gazonal got out, comprehending that he must pay for his supper. 'It will give me the greatest pleasure to offer you—er—a dress—a scarf—a mantilla of my own manufacture.'

'What, three things! Well, well, you are nicer than you look,' returned Carabine.

'Paris has caught me,' said Gazonal to himself, as he caught sight of Jenny Cadine, and went to pay his respects to her.

'And what should *I* have?' asked the actress.

'Why, my whole fortune!' cried Gazonal, shrewdly of the opinion that to offer all was to offer nothing.

Massol, Claude Vignon, du Tillet, Maxime de Trailles, Nucingen, Du Bruel, Malaga, M. and Mme. Gaillard, Vauvinet, and a host of others crowded in.

In the course of conversation, Massol and Gazonal went to the bottom of the dispute; the former, without committing himself, remarked that the report was not yet drawn up, and that citizens might put confidence in the lights and the independent opinion of the Council of

State. After this cut-and-dried response, Gazonal, losing hope, judged it necessary to win over the charming Jenny Cadine, with whom he fell head over ears in love. Léon de Lora and Bixiou left their victim in the clutches of the most mischief-loving woman in their singular set, for Jenny Cadine was the famous Déjazet's sole rival.

At the supper-table Gazonal was fascinated by the work of Froment Meurice, the modern Benvenuto Cellini—by costly plate, with contents worth the interest on the wrought silver that held them. The two perpetrators of the hoax had taken care to sit as far away from him as possible; but furtively they watched the wily actress's progress. Ensnared by that insidious hint of new furniture, she had set herself to carry Gazonal home with her; and never did lamb in the Fête-Dieu procession submit to be led by his St John the Baptist with a better grace than Gazonal showed in his obedience to this siren.

Three days afterwards, Léon and Bixiou having meanwhile seen and heard nothing of their friend, repaired to his lodging about two o'clock in the afternoon.

'Well, cousin, the decision has been given in your favour.'

'Alas! it makes no difference now, cousin,' Gazonal answered, turning his melancholy eyes upon them; 'I have turned Republican again.'

'*Quésaco?*' asked Léon.

'I have nothing left, not even enough to pay my counsel. Mme. Jenny Cadine holds bills of mine for more than I am worth——'

'It is a fact that Cadine is rather expensive, but——'

'Oh! I have had my money's worth. Ah! what a woman! After all, Paris is too much for a provincial. I am about to retire to La Trappe.'

'Good,' said Bixiou. 'Now you talk sensibly.

Here, acknowledge the sovereign power of the capital——'

'And of capital!' cried Léon, holding out Gazonal's bills.

Gazonal stared at the papers in bewilderment.

'You cannot say that we have no notion of hospitality; we have educated you, rescued you from want, treated you, and—amused you,' said Bixiou.

'And nothing to pay!' added Léon, with the gesture by which a street-boy conveys the idea that somebody has been successfully 'done.'

PARIS, *November* 1845.

A PRINCE OF BOHEMIA

TO HENRI HEINE

I inscribe this to you, my dear Heine, to you that represent in Paris the ideas and poetry of Germany, in Germany the lively and witty criticism of France; for you better than any other will know whatsoever this Study may contain of criticism and of jest, of love and truth.

De Balzac.

'My dear friend,' said Mme. de la Baudraye, drawing a pile of manuscript from beneath her sofa cushion, 'will you pardon me in our present straits for making a short story of something which you told me a few weeks ago?'

'Anything is fair in these times. Have you not seen writers serving up their own hearts to the public, or very often their mistresses' hearts when invention fails? We are coming to this, dear; we shall go in quest of adventures, not so much for the pleasure of them as for the sake of having the story to tell afterwards.'

'After all, you and the Marquise de Rochefide have paid the rent, and I do not think, from the way things are going here, that I ever pay yours.'

'Who knows. Perhaps the same good luck that befell Mme. de Rochefide may come to you.'

'Do you call it good luck to go back to one's husband?'

'No; only great luck. Come, I am listening.'
And Mme. de Baudraye read as follows :—

'Scene—a splendid salon in the Rue de Chartres-du-Roule. One of the most famous writers of the day discovered sitting on a settee beside a very illustrious Marquise, with whom he is on such terms of intimacy, as a man has a right to claim when a woman singles him out and keeps him at her side as a complacent *souffre-douleur* rather than a makeshift.

'Well,' says she, 'have you found those letters of which you spoke yesterday? You said that you could not tell me all about *him* without them?'

'Yes, I have them.'

'It is your turn to speak; I am listening like a child when his mother begins the tale of *Le Grand Serpentin Vert*.'

'I count the young man in question in that group of our acquaintances which we are wont to style our friends. He comes of a good family; he is a man of infinite parts and ill-luck, full of excellent dispositions and most charming conversation; young as he is, he has seen much, and while awaiting better things, he dwells in Bohemia. Bohemianism, which by rights should be called the doctrine of the Boulevard des Italiens, finds its recruits among young men between twenty and thirty, all of them men of genius in their way, little known, it is true, as yet, but sure of recognition one day, and when that day comes, of great distinction. They are distinguished as it is at carnival time, when their exuberant wit, repressed for the rest of the year, finds a vent in more or less ingenious buffoonery.

'What times we live in! What an irrational central power which allows such tremendous energies to run to waste! There are diplomatists in Bohemia quite

capable of overturning Russia's designs, if they but felt the power of France at their backs. There are writers, administrators, soldiers, and artists in Bohemia; every faculty, every kind of brain is represented there. Bohemia is a microcosm. If the Czar would buy Bohemia for a score of millions and set its population down in Odessa—always supposing that they consented to leave the asphalt of the boulevards—Odessa would be Paris with the year. In Bohemia, you find the flower doomed to wither and come to nothing; the flower of the wonderful young manhood of France, so sought after by Napoleon and Louis XIV., so neglected for the last thirty years by the modern Gerontocracy that is blighting everything else—that splendid young manhood of whom a witness so little prejudiced as Professor Tissot wrote, "On all sides the Emperor employed a younger generation in every way worthy of him; in his councils, in the general administration, in negotiations bristling with difficulties or full of danger, in the government of conquered countries; and in all places Youth responded to his demands upon it. Young men were for Napoleon the *missi dominici* of Charlemagne."

'The word Bohemia tells you everything. Bohemia has nothing and lives upon what it has. Hope is its religion; faith (in oneself) its creed; and charity is supposed to be its budget. All these young men are greater than their misfortune; they are under the feet of Fortune, yet more than equal to Fate. Always ready to mount and ride an *if*, witty as a *feuilleton*, blithe as only those can be that are deep in debt and drink deep to match, and finally—for here I come to my point—hot lovers, and what lovers! Picture to yourself Lovelace, and Henri Quatre, and the Regent, and Werther, and Saint-Preux, and René, and the Maréchal de Richelieu—think of all these in a single man, and you will have some idea of their way of love. What lovers! Eclectic of all things in love, they will serve up a passion to a

woman's order; their hearts are like a bill of fare in a restaurant. Perhaps they have never read Stendhal's *De l'Amour*, but unconsciously they put it in practice. They have by heart their chapters—Love-Taste, Love-Passion, Love-Caprice, Love-Crystallised, and more than all, Love-Transient. All is good in their eyes. They invented the burlesque axiom, "In the sight of man, all women are equal." The actual text is more vigorously worded, but as in my opinion the spirit is false, I do not stand nice upon the letter.

'My friend, madame, is named Gabriel Jean Anne Victor Benjamin George Ferdinand Charles Edward Rusticoli, Comte de la Palférine. The Rusticolis came to France with Catherine dei Medici, having been ousted about that time from their infinitesimal Tuscan sovereignty. They are distantly related to the house of Este, and connected by marriage with the Guises. On the Day of Saint-Bartholomew they slew a goodly number of Protestants, and Charles IX. bestowed the hand of the heiress of the Comte de la Palférine upon the Rusticoli of that time. The Comté, however, being a part of the confiscated lands of the Duke of Savoy, was repurchased by Henri IV. when that great king so far blundered as to restore the fief; and in exchange, the Rusticoli—who had borne arms long before the Medici bore them, to wit, *argent* a cross flory *azure* (the cross flower-de-luced by letters patent granted by Charles IX.), and a count's coronet, with two peasants for supporters with the motto IN HOC SIGNO VINCIMUS—the Rusticoli, I repeat, retained their title, and received a couple of offices under the crown with the government of a province.

'From the time of the Valois till the reign of Richelieu, as it may be called, the Rusticoli played a most illustrious part; under Louis XIV. their glory waned somewhat, under Louis XV. it went out altogether. My friend's grandfather wasted all that was

left to the once brilliant house with Mlle. Laguerre, whom he first discovered, and brought into fashion before Bouret's time. Charles Edward's own father was an officer without any fortune in 1789. The Revolution came to his assistance; he had the sense to drop his title, and became plain Rusticoli. Among other deeds, M. Rusticoli married a wife during the war in Italy, a Capponi, a goddaughter of the Countess of Albany (hence La Palférine's final names). Rusticoli was one of the best colonels in the army. The Emperor made him a commander of the Legion of Honour and a count. His spine was slightly curved, and his son was wont to say of him laughingly that he was *un comte refait* (*contrefait*).

'General Count Rusticoli, for he became a brigadier-general at Ratisbon and a general of the division on the field of Wagram, died at Vienna almost immediately after his promotion, or his name and ability would sooner or later have brought him the marshal's bâton. Under the Restoration he would certainly have repaired the fortunes of a great and noble family so brilliant even as far back as 1100, centuries before they took the French title—for the Rusticoli had given a pope to the church and twice revolutionised the kingdom of Naples—so illustrious again under the Valois; so dexterous in the days of the Fronde, that obstinate Frondeurs though they were, they still existed through the reign of Louis XIV. Mazarin favoured them; there was the Tuscan strain in them still, and he recognised it.

'To-day, when Charles Edward de la Palférine's name is mentioned, not three persons in a hundred know the history of his house. But the Bourbons have actually left a Foix-Grailly to live by his easel.

'Ah! if you but knew how brilliantly Charles Edward accepts his obscure position! how he scoffs at the bourgeois of 1830! What Attic salt in his wit! He

would be the king of Bohemia, if Bohemia would endure a king. His *verve* is inexhaustible. To him we owe a map of the country and the names of the seven castles which Nodier could not discover.'

'The one thing wanting in one of the cleverest skits of our time,' said the Marquise.

'You can form your own opinion of La Palférine from a few characteristic touches,' continued Nathan. 'He once came upon a friend of his, a fellow Bohemian, involved in a dispute on the boulevard with a bourgeois who chose to consider himself affronted. To the modern powers that be, Bohemia is insolent in the extreme. There was talk of calling one another out.

'"One moment," interposed La Palférine, as much Lauzun for the occasion as Lauzun himself could have been. "One moment. Monsieur was born, I suppose?"

'"What, sir?"

'"Yes, are you born? What is your name?"

'"Godin."

'"Godin, eh!" exclaimed La Palférine's friend.

'"One moment, my dear fellow," interrupted La Palférine. "There are the Trigaudins. Are you one of them?"

'Astonishment.

'"No? Then you are one of the new dukes of Gaëta, I suppose, of imperial creation? No? Oh, well, how can you expect my friend to cross swords with you when he will be secretary of an embassy and ambassador *some day*, and you will owe him respect? *Godin*! the thing is non-existent! You are a nonentity, Godin. My friend cannot be expected to beat the air! When one is somebody, one cannot fight with a nobody! Come, my dear fellow—good-day."

'"My respects to Madame," added the friend.

'Another day La Palférine was walking with a friend who flung his cigar end in the face of a passer-by. The recipient had the bad taste to resent this.

'"You have stood your antagonist's fire," said the

young Count, "the witnesses declare that honour is satisfied."

'La Palférine owed his tailor a thousand francs, and the man instead of going himself sent his assistant to ask for the money. The assistant found the unfortunate debtor up six pairs of stairs at the back of a yard at the further end of the Faubourg du Roule. The room was unfurnished save for a bed (such a bed!), a table, and such a table! La Palférine heard the preposterous demand—"A demand which I should qualify as illegal," he said when he told us the story, "made, as it was, at seven o'clock in the morning."

'"Go," he answered, with the gesture and attitude of a Mirabeau, "tell your master in what condition you find me."

'The assistant apologised and withdrew. La Palférine, seeing the young man on the landing, rose in the attire celebrated in verse in *Britannicus* to add, "Remark the stairs! Pay particular attention to the stairs; do not forget to tell him about the stairs!"

'In every position into which chance has thrown La Palférine, he has never failed to rise to the occasion. All that he does is witty and never in bad taste; always and in everything he displays the genius of Rivarol, the polished subtlety of the old French noble. It was he who told that delicious anecdote of a friend of Laffitte the banker. A national fund had been started to give back to Laffitte the mansion in which the Revolution of 1830 was brewed; and this friend appeared at the offices of the fund with, "Here are five francs, give me a hundred sous change!"—A caricature was made of it.—It was once La Palférine's misfortune, in judicial style, to make a young girl a mother. The girl, not a very simple innocent, confessed all to her mother, a respectable matron, who hurried forthwith to La Palférine and asked what he meant to do.

'"Why, madam," said he, "I am neither a surgeon nor a midwife."

'She collapsed, but three or four years later she returned to the charge, still persisting in her inquiry, "What did La Palférine mean to do?"

'"Well, madam," returned he, "when the child is seven years old, an age at which a boy ought to pass out of women's hands"—an indication of entire agreement on the mother's part—"if the child is really mine"—another gesture of assent—"if there is a striking likeness, if he bids fair to be a gentleman, if I can recognise in him my turn of mind, and more particularly the Rusticoli air; then, oh—ah!"— a new movement from the matron—"on my word and honour, I will make him a cornet of—sugar-plums!"

'All this, if you will permit me to make use of the phraseology employed by M. Sainte-Beuve for his biographies of obscurities—all this, I repeat, is the playful and sprightly yet already somewhat decadent side of a strong race. It smacks rather of the Parc-aux-Cerfs than of the Hôtel de Rambouillet. It is a race of the strong rather than of the sweet; I incline to lay a little debauchery to its charge, and more than I should wish in brilliant and generous natures; it is gallantry after the fashion of the Maréchal de Richelieu, high spirits and frolic carried rather too far; perhaps we may see in it the *outrances* of another age, the Eighteenth Century pushed to extremes; it harks back to the Musketeers; it is an exploit stolen from Champcenetz; nay, such light-hearted inconstancy takes us back to the festooned and ornate period of the old court of the Valois. In an age as moral as the present, we are bound to regard audacity of this kind sternly; still, at the same time that "cornet of sugar-plums" may serve to warn young girls of the perils of lingering where fancies, more charming than chastened, come thickly from the first; on the rosy flowery unguarded slopes, where trespasses ripen into errors full of equivocal effervescence, into too palpitating issues. The anecdote puts La Palférine's

genius before you in all its vivacity and completeness. He realises Pascal's *entre-deux*, he comprehends the whole scale between tenderness and pitilessness, and, like Epaminondas, he is equally great in extremes. And no merely so, his epigram stamps the epoch ; the *accoucheur* is a modern innovation. All the refinements of modern civilisation are summed up in the phrase. It is monumental.'

'Look here, my dear Nathan, what farrago of nonsense is this ?' asked the Marquise in bewilderment.

'Madame la Marquise,' returned Nathan, 'you do not know the value of these "precious" phrases ; I am talking Sainte-Beuve, the new kind of French.—I resume. Walking one day arm in arm with a friend along the boulevard, he was accosted by a ferocious creditor, who inquired—

'"Are you thinking of me, sir ?"

'"Not the least in the world," answered the Count.

'Remark the difficulty of the position. Talleyrand, in similar circumstances, had already replied, "You are very inquisitive, my dear fellow !" To imitate the inimitable great man was out of the question.—La Palférine, generous as Buckingham, could not bear to be caught empty-handed. One day when he had nothing to give a little Savoyard chimney-sweeper, he dipped a hand into a barrel of grapes in a grocer's doorway and filled the child's cap from it. The little one ate away at his grapes ; the grocer began by laughing, and ended by holding out his hand.

'"Oh, fie ! monsieur," said La Palférine, "your left hand ought not to know what my right hand doth."

'With his adventurous courage, he never refuses any odds, but there is wit in his bravado. In the Passage de l'Opéra he chanced to meet a man who had spoken slightingly of him, elbowed him as he passed, and then turned and jostled him a second time.

'"You are very clumsy !"

'"On the contrary; I did it on purpose."

'The young man pulled out his card. La Palférine dropped it. "It has been carried too long in the pocket. Be good enough to give me another."

'On the ground he received a thrust; blood was drawn; his antagonist wished to stop.

'"You are wounded, monsieur!"

'"I disallow the *botte*," said La Palférine, as coolly as if he had been in the fencing saloon; then as he riposted, (sending the point home this time), he added, "There is the right thrust, monsieur!"

'His antagonist kept his bed ror six months.

'This, still following on M. Sainte-Beuve's tracks, recalls the *raffinés*, the fine-edged raillery of the best days of the monarchy. In this speech you discern an untrammelled but drifting life; a gaiety of imagination that deserts us when our first youth is past. The prime of the blossom is over, but there remains the dry compact seed with the germs of life in it, ready against the coming winter. Do you not see that these things are symptoms of something unsatisfied, of an unrest impossible to analyse, still less to describe, yet not incomprehensible; a something ready to break out if occasion calls into flying upleaping flame? It is the *accidia* of the cloister; a trace of sourness, of ferment engendered by the enforced stagnation of youthful energies, a vague, obscure melancholy.'

'That will do,' said the Marquise; 'you are giving me a mental shower bath.'

'It is the early afternoon languor. If a man has nothing to do, he will sooner get into mischief than do nothing at all; this invariably happens in France. Youth at the present day has two sides to it; the studious or unappreciated, and the ardent or *passionné*.'

'That will do!' repeated Mme. de Rochefide, with an authoritative gesture. 'You are setting my nerves on edge.'

'To finish my portrait of La Palférine, I hasten to make the plunge into the gallant regions of his character, or you will not understand the peculiar genius of an admirable representative of a certain section of mischievous youth—youth strong enough, be it said, to laugh at the position in which it is put by those in power; shrewd enough to do no work, since work profiteth nothing, yet so full of life that it fastens upon pleasure—the one thing that cannot be taken away. And meanwhile a bourgeois, mercantile, and bigoted policy continues to cut off all the sluices through which so much aptitude and ability would find an outlet. Poets and men of science are not wanted.

'To give you an idea of the stupidity of the new court, I will tell you of something which happened to La Palférine. There is a sort of relieving officer on the civil list. This functionary one day discovered that La Palférine was in dire distress, drew up a report no doubt, and brought the descendant of the Rusticolis fifty francs by way of alms. La Palférine received the visitor with perfect courtesy, and talked of various persons at court.

'"Is it true," he asked, "that Mlle. d'Orléans contributes such and such a sum to this benevolent scheme started by her nephew? If so, it is very gracious of her."

'Now La Palférine had a servant, a little Savoyard aged ten, who waited on him without wages. La Palférine called him Father Anchises, and used to say, "I have never seen such a mixture of besotted foolishness with great intelligence; he would go through fire and water for me; he understands everything—and yet he cannot grasp the fact that I can do nothing for him."

'Anchises was despatched to a livery stable with instructions to hire a handsome brougham with a man in livery behind it. By the time the carriage arrived below, La Palférine had skilfully piloted the conversation

to the subject of the functions of his visitor, whom he has since called "the unmitigated misery man," and learned the nature of his duties and his stipend.

'"Do they allow you a carriage to go about the town in this way?"

'"Oh! no."

'At that La Palférine and a friend who happened to be with him went downstairs with the poor soul, and insisted on putting him into the carriage. It was raining in torrents. La Palférine had thought of everything. He offered to drive the official to the next house on his list; and when the almoner came down again, he found the carriage waiting for him at the door. The man in livery handed him a note written in pencil:—

'"The carriage has been engaged for three days. Count Rusticoli de la Palférine is too happy to associate himself with Court charities by lending wings to Royal beneficence."

'La Palférine now calls the civil list the uncivil list.

'He was once passionately loved by a lady of somewhat light conduct. Antonia lived in the Rue du Helder; she had seen and been seen to some extent, but at the time of her acquaintance with La Palférine she had not yet "an establishment." Antonia was not wanting in the insolence of old days, now degenerating into rudeness among women of her class. After a fortnight of unmixed bliss, she was compelled, in the interest of her civil list, to return to a less exclusive system; and La Palférine, discovering a certain lack of sincerity in her dealings with him, sent Madam Antonia a note which made her famous.

'"Madame,—Your conduct causes me much surprise and no less distress. Not content with rending my heart with your disdain, you have been so little thoughtful as to retain a toothbrush, which my means will not permit

me to replace, my estates being mortgaged beyond their value.

'"Adieu, too fair and too ungrateful friend! May we meet again in a better world.

'"CHARLES EDWARD."

'Assuredly (to avail ourselves yet further of Sainte-Beuve's Babylonish dialect), this far outpasses the raillery of Sterne's *Sentimental Journey*; it might be Scarron without his grossness. Nay, I do not know but that Molière in his lighter mood would not have said of it, as of Cyrano de Bergerac's best—"This is mine." Richelieu himself was not more complete when he wrote to the princess waiting for him in the Palais Royal—"Stay there, my queen, to charm the scullion lads." At the same time, Charles Edward's humour is less biting. I am not sure that this kind of wit was known among the Greeks and Romans. Plato, possibly, upon a closer inspection, approaches it, but from the austere and musical side——'

'No more of that jargon,' the Marquise broke in, 'in print it may be endurable; but to have it grating upon my ears is a punishment which I do not in the least deserve.'

'He first met Claudine on this wise,' continued Nathan. 'It was one of the unfilled days, when Youth is a burden to itself; days when Youth, reduced by the overweening presumption of Age to a condition of potential energy and dejection, emerges therefrom (like Blondet under the Restoration), either to get into mischief or to set about some colossal piece of buffoonery, half excused by the very audacity of its conception. La Palférine was sauntering, cane in hand, up and down the pavement between the Rue de Grammont and the Rue de Richelieu, when in the distance he descried a woman too elegantly dressed, covered, as he phrased it, with a great deal of portable property, too expensive and too

carelessly worn for its owner to be other than a princess of the Court or of the stage, it was not easy at first to say which. But after July 1830, in his opinion, there is no mistaking the indications—the princess can only be a princess of the stage.

'The Count came up and walked by her side as if she had given him an assignation. He followed her with a courteous persistence, a persistence in good taste, giving the lady from time to time, and always at the right moment, an authoritative glance, which compelled her to submit to his escort. Anybody but La Palférine would have been frozen by his reception, and disconcerted by the lady's first efforts to rid herself of her cavalier, by her chilly air, her curt speeches; but no gravity, with all the will in the world, could hold out long against La Palférine's jesting replies. The fair stranger went into her milliner's shop. Charles Edward followed, took a seat, and gave his opinions and advice like a man that meant to pay. This coolness disturbed the lady, she went out.

'On the stairs she spoke to her persecutor.

'"Monsieur, I am about to call upon one of my husband's relatives, an elderly lady, Mme. de Bonfalot——'

'"Ah! Mme. de Bonfalot, charmed, I am sure. I am going there."

'The pair accordingly went. Charles Edward came in with the lady, every one believed that she had brought him with her. He took part in the conversation, was lavish of his polished and brilliant wit. The visit lengthened out. This was not what he wanted.

'"Madame," he said, addressing the fair stranger, "do not forget that your husband is waiting for us, and only allowed us a quarter of an hour."

'Taken aback by such boldness (which, as you know, is never displeasing to you women), led captive by the conqueror's glance, by the astute yet candid air which Charles Edward can assume when he chooses, the lady

rose, took the arm of her self-constituted escort, and went downstairs, but on the threshold she stopped to speak to him.

'"Monsieur, I like a joke——"

'"And so do I."

'She laughed.

'"But this may turn to earnest," he added; "it only rests with you. I am the Comte de la Palférine, and I am delighted that it is in my power to lay my heart and my fortune at your feet."

'La Palférine was at that time twenty-two years old. (This happened in 1834.) Luckily for him, he was fashionably dressed. I can paint his portrait for you in a few words. He was the living image of Louis XIII., with the same white forehead and gracious outline of the temples, the same olive skin (that Italian olive tint which turns white where the light falls on it), the brown hair worn rather long, the black "royale," the grave and melancholy expression, for La Palférine's character and exterior were amazingly at variance.

'At the sound of the name, and the sight of its owner, something like a quiver thrilled through Claudine. La Palférine saw the vibration, and shot a glance at her out of the dark depths of almond-shaped eyes with purpled lids, and those faint lines about them which tell of pleasures as costly as painful fatigue. With those eyes upon her, she said—"Your address?"

'"What want of address!"

'"Oh, pshaw!" she said, smiling. "A bird on the bough?"

'"Good-bye, madame, you are such a woman as I seek, but my fortune is far from equalling my desire——"

'He bowed, and there and then left her. Two days later, by one of the strange chances that can only happen in Paris, he had betaken himself to a money-lending wardrobe dealer to sell such of his clothing as he could spare. He was just receiving the price with an uneasy

air, after long chaffering, when the stranger lady passed and recognised him.

'"Once for all," cried he to the bewildered wardrobe dealer, "I tell you, I am not going to take your trumpet!"

'He pointed to a huge, much-dinted musical instrument, hanging up outside against a background of uniforms, civil and military. Then, proudly and impetuously, he followed the lady.

'From that great day of the trumpet these two understood one another to admiration. Charles Edward's ideas on the subject of love are as sound as possible. According to him, a man cannot love twice, there is but one love in his lifetime, but that love is a deep and shoreless sea. It may break in upon him at any time, as the grace of God found St. Paul; and a man may live sixty years and never know love. Perhaps, to quote Heine's superb phrase, it is "the secret malady of the heart"—a sense of the Infinite that there is within us, together with the revelation of the ideal Beauty in its visible form. This Love, in short, comprehends both the creature and creation. But so long as there is no question of this great poetical conception, the loves that cannot last can only be taken lightly, as if they were in a manner snatches of song compared with Love the epic.

'To Charles Edward the adventure brought neither the thunderbolt signal of love's coming, nor yet that gradual revelation of an inward fairness which draws two natures by degrees more and more strongly each to each. For there are but two ways of love—love at first sight, doubtless akin to the Highland "second sight," and that slow fusion of two natures which realises Plato's "man-woman." But if Charles Edward did not love, he was loved to distraction. Claudine found love made complete, body and soul; in her, in short, La Palférine awakened the one passion of her life; while

for him Claudine was only a most charming mistress. The Devil himself, a most potent magician certainly, with all hell at his back, could never have changed the natures of these two unequal fires. I dare affirm that Claudine not unfrequently bored Charles Edward.'

'"Stale fish and the woman you do not love are only fit to fling out of the window after three days," he used to say.

'In Bohemia there is little secrecy observed over these affairs. La Palférine used to talk a good deal of Claudine; but, at the same time, none of us saw her, nor so much as knew her name. For us Claudine was almost a mythical personage. All of us acted in the same way, reconciling the requirements of our common life with the rules of good taste. Claudine, Hortense, the Baroness, the Bourgeoise, the Empress, the Spaniard, the Lioness,—these were cryptic titles which permitted us to pour out our joys, our cares, vexations, and hopes, and to communicate our discoveries. Further, none of us went. It has been known, in Bohemia, that chance discovered the identity of the fair unknown; and at once, as by tacit convention, not one of us spoke of her again. This fact may show how far youth possesses a sense of true delicacy. How admirably certain natures of a finer clay know the limit line where jest must end, and all that host of things French covered by the slang word *blague*, a word which will shortly be cast out of the language (let us hope), and yet it is the only one which conveys an idea of the spirit of Bohemia.

'So we often used to joke about Claudine and the Count—"What are you making of Claudine?"—"How is Claudine?"—"*Toujours Claudine?*" sung to the air of *Toujours Gessler*.'

'"I wish you all such a mistress, for all the harm I wish you," La Palférine began one day. "No greyhound, no basset-dog, no poodle can match her in gentleness, submissiveness, and complete tenderness.

There are times when I reproach myself, when I take myself to task for my hard heart. Claudine obeys with saintly sweetness. She comes to me, I tell her to go, she goes, she does not even cry till she is out in the courtyard. I refuse to see her for a whole week at a time. I tell her to come at such an hour on Tuesday; and be it midnight or six o'clock in the morning, ten o'clock, five o'clock, breakfast time, dinner time, bed time, any particularly inconvenient hour in the day—she will come, punctual to the minute, beautiful, beautifully dressed, and enchanting. And she is a married woman, with all the complications and duties of a household. The fibs that she must invent, the reasons she must find for conforming to my whims would tax the ingenuity of some of us! . . . Claudine never wearies; you can always count upon her. It is not love, I tell her, it is infatuation. She writes to me every day; I do not read her letters; she found that out, but still she writes. See here; there are two hundred letters in this casket. She begs me to wipe my razors on one of her letters every day, and I punctually do so. She thinks, and rightly, that the sight of her handwriting will put me in mind of her."

'La Palférine was dressing as he told us this. I took up the letter which he was about to put to this use, read it, and kept it, as he did not ask to have it back. Here it is. I looked for it, and found it as I promised.

"*Monday (Midnight).*

'"Well, my dear, are you satisfied with me? I did not even ask for your hand, yet you might easily have given it to me, and I longed so much to hold it to my heart, to my lips. No, I did not ask, I am so afraid of displeasing you. Do you know one thing? Though I am cruelly sure that anything I do is a matter of perfect indifference to you, I am none the less extremely timid in my conduct: the woman that belongs to you,

whatever her title to call herself yours, must not incur so much as the shadow of blame. In so far as love comes from the angels in heaven, from whom there are no secrets hid, my love is as pure as the purest; wherever I am I feel that I am in your presence, and I try to do you honour.

'"All that you said about my manner of dress impressed me very much; I began to understand how far above others are those that come of a noble race. There was still something of the opera girl in my gowns, in my way of dressing my hair. In a moment I saw the distance between me and good taste. Next time you shall receive a duchess, you shall not know me again! Ah! how good you have been to your Claudine! How many and many a time I have thanked you for telling me these things! What interest lay in those few words! You had taken thought for that thing belonging to you called Claudine? *This* imbecile would never have opened my eyes; he thinks that everything I do is right; and besides, he is much too humdrum, too matter-of-fact to have any feeling for the beautiful.

'"Tuesday is very slow of coming for my impatient mind! On Tuesday I shall be with you for several hours. Ah! when it comes I will try to think that the hours are months, that it will be so always. I am living in hope of that morning now, as I shall live upon the memory of it afterwards. Hope is memory that craves; and recollection, memory sated. What a beautiful life within life thought makes for us in this way!

'"Sometimes I dream of inventing new ways of tenderness all my own, a secret which no other woman shall guess. A cold sweat breaks out over me at the thought that something may happen to prevent this meeting. Oh, I would break with *him* for good, if need was, but nothing here could possibly interfere; it would be from your side. Perhaps you may decide to go out, perhaps to go to see some other woman. Oh!

spare me this Tuesday for pity's sake. If you take it from me, Charles, you do not know what *he* will suffer; I should drive him wild. But even if you do not want me, if you are going out, let me come, all the same, to be with you while you dress; only to see you, I ask no more than that; only to show you that I love you without a thought of self.

'"Since you gave me leave to love you, for you gave me leave, since I am yours; since that day I loved and love you with the whole strength of my soul; and I shall love you for ever, for once having loved *you*, no one could, no one ought to love another. And, you see, when those eyes that ask nothing but to see you are upon you, you will feel that in your Claudine there is a something divine, called into existence by you.

'"Alas! with you I can never play the coquette. I am like a mother with her child; I endure anything from you; I, that was once so imperious and proud. I have made dukes and princes fetch and carry for me; aides de camp, worth more than all the court of Charles x. put together, have done my errands, yet I am treating you as my spoilt child. But where is the use of coquetry? It would be pure waste. And yet, monsieur, for want of coquetry I shall never inspire love in you. I know it; I feel it; yet I do as before, feeling a power that I cannot withstand, thinking that this utter self-surrender will win me the sentiment innate in all men (so *he* tells me) for the thing that belongs to them.

"*Wednesday.*

'"Ah! how darkly sadness entered my heart yesterday when I found that I must give up the joy of seeing you. One single thought held me back from the arms of Death!—It was thy will! To stay away was to do thy will, to obey an order from thee. Oh! Charles, I was so pretty; I looked a lovelier woman for you than

that beautiful German princess whom you gave me for an example, whom I have studied at the Opéra. And yet—you might have thought that I had overstepped the limits of my nature. You have left me no confidence in myself; perhaps I am plain after all. Oh! I loathe myself, I dream of my radiant Charles Edward, and my brain turns. I shall go mad, I know I shall. Do not laugh, do not talk to me of the fickleness of women. If we are inconstant, *you* are strangely capricious. You take away the hours of love that made a poor creature's happiness for ten whole days; the hours on which she drew to be charming and kind to all that came to see her! After all, you were the source of my kindness to *him*; you do not know what pain you give him. I wonder what I must do to keep you, or simply to keep the right to be yours sometimes. . . . When I think that you never would come here to me! . . . With what delicious emotion I would wait upon you!—There are other women more favoured than I. There are women to whom you say, 'I love you.' To me you have never said more than 'You are a good girl.' Certain speeches of yours, though you do not know it, gnaw at my heart. Clever men sometimes ask me what I am thinking. . . . I am thinking of my self-abasement—the prostration of the poorest outcast in the presence of the Saviour."

'There are still three more pages, you see. La Palférine allowed me to take the letter, with the traces of tears that still seemed hot upon it! Here was proof of the truth of his story. Marcas, a shy man enough with women, was in ecstasies over a second which he read in his corner before lighting his pipe with it.

'"Why, any woman in love will write that sort of thing!" cried La Palférine. "Love gives all women intelligence and style, which proves that here in France style proceeds from the matter and not from the words.

See now how well this is thought out, how clear-headed sentiment is "—and with that he read us another letter, far superior to the artificial and laboured productions which we novelists write.

'One day poor Claudine heard that La Palférine was in a critical position; it was a question of meeting a bill of exchange. An unlucky idea occurred to her; she put a tolerably large sum in gold into an exquisitely embroidered purse and went to him.

'"Who has taught you to be so bold as to meddle with my household affairs?" La Palférine cried angrily. "Mend my socks and work slippers for me, if it amuses you. So!——you will play the duchess, and you turn the story of Danaë against the aristocracy."

'He emptied the purse into his hand as he spoke, and made as though he would fling the money in her face. Claudine, in her terror, did not guess that he was joking; she shrank back, stumbled over a chair, and fell with her head against the corner of the marble chimney-piece. She thought she should have died. When she could speak, poor woman, as she lay on the bed, all that she said was, "I deserved it, Charles!"

'For a moment La Palférine was in despair; his anguish revived Claudine. She rejoiced in the mishap; she took advantage of her suffering to compel La Palférine to take the money and release him from an awkward position. Then followed a variation on La Fontaine's fable, in which a man blesses the thieves that brought him a sudden impulse of tenderness from his wife. And while we are upon this subject, another saying will paint the man for you.

'Claudine went home again, made up some kind of tale as best she could to account for her bruised forehead, and fell dangerously ill. An abscess formed in the head. The doctor—Bianchon, I believe—yes, it was Bianchon—wanted to cut off her hair. The Duchesse de Berri's hair is not more beautiful than Claudine's;

she would not hear of it, she told Bianchon in confidence that she could not allow it to be cut without leave from the Comte de la Palférine. Bianchon went to Charles Edward. Charles Edward heard him with much seriousness. The doctor had explained the case at length, and showed that it was absolutely necessary to sacrifice the hair to ensure the success of the operation.

'"Cut off Claudine's hair!" cried he in peremptory tones. "No. I would sooner lose her."'

'Even now, after a lapse of four years, Bianchon still quotes that speech; we have laughed over it for half an hour together. Claudine, informed of the verdict, saw in it a proof of affection; she felt sure that she was loved. In the face of her weeping family, with her husband on his knees, she was inexorable. She kept her hair. The strength that came with the belief that she was loved came to her aid, the operation succeeded perfectly. There are stirrings of the inner life which throw all the calculations of surgery into disorder and baffle the laws of medical science.

'Claudine wrote a delicious letter to La Palférine, a letter in which the orthography was doubtful and the punctuation all to seek, to tell him of the happy result of the operation, and to add that Love was wiser than all the sciences.'

'"Now," said La Palférine one day, "what am I to do to get rid of Claudine?"

'"Why, she is not at all troublesome; she leaves you master of your actions," objected we.

'"That is true," returned La Palférine, "but I do not choose that anything shall slip into my life without my consent."

'From that day he set himself to torment Claudine. It seemed that he held the bourgeoise, the nobody, in utter horror; nothing would satisfy him but a woman with a title. Claudine, it was true, had made progress; she had learned to dress as well as the best-dressed

women of the Faubourg Saint-Germain ; she had freed her bearing of unhallowed traces ; she walked with a chastened, inimitable grace ; but this was not enough. This praise of her enabled Claudine to swallow down the rest.

'But one day La Palférine said, "If you wish to be the mistress of one La Palférine, poor, penniless, and without prospects as he is, you ought at least to represent him worthily. You should have a carriage and liveried servants and a title. Give me all the gratifications of vanity that will never be mine in my own person. The woman whom I honour with my regard ought never to go on foot ; if she is bespattered with mud, I suffer. That is how I am made. If she is mine, she must be admired of all Paris. All Paris shall envy me my good fortune. If some little whipper-snapper seeing a brilliant countess pass in her brilliant carriage shall say to himself, 'Who can call such a divinity his ?' and grow thoughtful—why, it will double my pleasure."

'La Palférine owned to us that he flung this programme at Claudine's head simply to rid himself of her. As a result he was stupefied with astonishment for the first and probably the only time in his life.

"Dear," she said, and there was a ring in her voice that betrayed the great agitation which shook her whole being, "it is well. All this shall be done, or I will die."

'She let fall a few happy tears on his hand as she kissed it.

'"You have told me what I must do to be your mistress still," she added ; "I am glad."

'"And then" (La Palférine told us) "she went out with a little coquettish gesture like a woman that has had her way. As she stood in my garret doorway, tall and proud, she seemed to reach the stature of an antique sibyl."

'All this should sufficiently explain the manners and

customs of the Bohemia in which this young *condottiere* is one of the most brilliant figures,' Nathan continued after a pause. 'Now it so happened that I discovered Claudine's identity, and could understand the appalling truth of one line which you perhaps overlooked in that letter of hers. It was on this wise.'

The Marquise, too thoughtful now for laughter, bade Nathan 'Go on,' in a tone that told him plainly how deeply she had been impressed by these strange things, and even more plainly how much she was interested in La Palférine.

'In 1829, one of the most influential, steady, and clever of dramatic writers was du Bruel. His real name is unknown to the public, on the playbills he is de Cursy. Under the Restoration he had a place in the Civil Service; and being really attached to the elder branch, he sent in his resignation bravely in 1830, and ever since has written twice as many plays to fill the deficit in his budget made by his noble conduct. At that time du Bruel was forty years old; you know the story of his life. Like many of his brethren, he bore a stage dancer an affection hard to explain, but well known in the whole world of letters. The woman, as you know, was Tullia, one of the *premiers sujets* of the Académie Royale de Musique. Tullia is merely a pseudonym like du Bruel's name of de Cursy.

'For the ten years between 1817 and 1827 Tullia was in her glory on the heights of the stage of the Opéra. With more beauty than education, a mediocre dancer with rather more sense than most of her class, she took no part in the virtuous reforms which ruined the corps de ballet; she continued the Guimard dynasty. She owed her ascendency, moreover, to various well-known protectors, to the Duc de Rhétoré (the Duc de Chaulieu's eldest son), to the influence of a famous Superintendent of Fine Arts, and sundry diplomatists and rich foreigners. During her apogee she had a neat little house in the

Rue Chauchat, and lived as Opera nymphs used to live in the old days. Du Bruel was smitten with her about the time when the Duke's fancy came to an end in 1823. Being a mere subordinate in the Civil Service, du Bruel tolerated the Superintendent of Fine Arts, believing that he himself was really preferred. After six years this connection was almost a marriage. Tullia has always been very careful to say nothing of her family; we have a vague idea that she comes from Nanterre. One of her uncles, formerly a simple bricklayer or carpenter, is now, it is said, a very rich contractor, thanks to her influence and generous loans. This fact leaked out through du Bruel. He happened to say that Tullia would inherit a fine fortune sooner or later. The contractor was a bachelor; he had a weakness for the niece to whom he is indebted.

'"He is not clever enough to be ungrateful," said she.

'In 1829 Tullia retired from the stage of her own accord. At the age of thirty she saw that she was growing somewhat stouter, and she had tried pantomime without success. Her whole art consisted in the trick of raising her skirts, after Noblet's manner, in a pirouette which inflated them balloon-fashion and exhibited the smallest possible quantity of clothing to the pit. The aged Vestris had told her at the very beginning that this *temps*, well executed by a fine woman, is worth all the art imaginable. It is the chest-note C of dancing. For which reason, he said, the very greatest dancers—Camargo, Guimard, and Taglioni, all of them thin, brown, and plain—could only redeem their physical defects by their genius. Tullia, still in the height of her glory, retired before younger and cleverer dancers; she did wisely. She was an aristocrat; she had scarcely stooped below the noblesse in her *liaisons*; she declined to dip her ankles in the troubled waters of July. Insolent and beautiful as she was, Claudine possessed handsome souvenirs, but very little

ready money ; still, her jewels were magnificent, and she had as fine furniture as any one in Paris.

'On quitting the stage when she, forgotten to-day, was yet in the height of her fame, one thought possessed her—she meant du Bruel to marry her ; and at the time of this story, you must understand that the marriage had taken place, but was kept a secret. How do women of her class contrive to make a man marry them after seven or eight years of intimacy ? What springs do they touch ? What machinery do they set in motion ? But, however comical such domestic dramas may be, we are not now concerned with them. Du Bruel was secretly married ; the thing was done.

'Cursy before his marriage was supposed to be a jolly companion ; now and again he stayed out all night, and to some extent led the life of a Bohemian ; he would unbend at a supper-party. He went out to all appearance to a rehearsal at the Opéra-Comique, and found himself in some unaccountable way at Dieppe, or Baden, or Saint-Germain ; he gave dinners, led the Titanic thriftless life of artists, journalists, and writers ; levied his tribute on all the greenrooms of Paris ; and, in short, was one of us. Finot, Lousteau, du Tillet, Desroches, Bixiou, Blondet, Couture, and des Lupeaulx tolerated him in spite of his pedantic manner and ponderous official attitude. But once married, Tullia made a slave of du Bruel. There was no help for it. He was in love with Tullia, poor devil.

'"Tullia" (so he said) "had left the stage to be his alone, to be a good and charming wife." And somehow Tullia managed to induce the most Puritanical members of du Bruel's family to accept her. From the very first, before any one suspected her motives, she assiduously visited old Mme. de Bonfalot, who bored her horribly ; she made handsome presents to mean old Mme. de Chissé, du Bruel's great-aunt ; she spent a summer with the latter lady, and never missed a single

mass. She even went to confession, received absolution, and took the sacrament; but this, you must remember, was in the country, and under the aunt's eyes.

'"I shall have real aunts now, do you understand?" she said to us when she came back in the winter.

'She was so delighted with her respectability, so glad to renounce her independence, that she found means to compass her end. She flattered the old people. She went on foot every day to sit for a couple of hours with Mme. du Bruel the elder while that lady was ill — a Maintenon's stratagem which amazed du Bruel. And he admired his wife without criticism; he was so fast in the toils already that he did not feel his bonds.

'Claudine succeeded in making him understand that only under the elastic system of a bourgeois government, only at the bourgeois court of the Citizen-King, could a Tullia, now metamorphosed into a Mme. du Bruel, be accepted in the society which her good sense prevented her from attempting to enter. Mme. de Bonfalot, Mme. de Chissé, and Mme. du Bruel received her; she was satisfied. She took up the position of a well-conducted, simple, and virtuous woman, and never acted out of character. In three years' time she was introduced to the friends of these ladies.

'"And still I cannot persuade myself that young Mme. du Bruel used to display her ankles, and the rest, to all Paris, with the light of a hundred gas-jets pouring upon her," Mme. Anselme Popinot remarked naïvely.

'From this point of view, July 1830 inaugurated an era not unlike the time of the Empire, when a waiting woman was received at Court in the person of Mme. Garat, a chief-justice's "lady." Tullia had completely broken, as you may guess, with all her old associates; of her former acquaintances, she only recognised those who could not compromise her. At the time of her marriage she had taken a very charming little hôtel

between a court and a garden, lavishing money on it with wild extravagance and putting the best part of her furniture and du Bruel's into it. Everything that she thought common or ordinary was sold. To find anything comparable to her sparkling splendour, you could only look back to the days when a Sophie Arnould, a Guimard, or a Duthé, in all her glory, squandered the fortunes of princes.

'How far did this sumptuous existence affect du Bruel? It is a delicate question to ask, and a still more delicate one to answer. A single incident will suffice to give you an idea of Tullia's crotchets. Her bed-spread of Brussels lace was worth ten thousand francs. A famous actress had another like it. As soon as Claudine heard this, she allowed her cat, a splendid Angora, to sleep on the bed. That trait gives you the woman. Du Bruel dared not say a word; he was ordered to spread abroad that challenge in luxury, so that it might reach the other. Tullia was very fond of this gift from the Duc de Rhétoré; but one day, five years after her marriage, she played with her cat to such purpose that the coverlet—furbelows, flounces, and all—was torn to shreds, and replaced by a sensible quilt, a quilt that was a quilt, and not a symptom of the peculiar form of insanity which drives these women to make up by an insensate luxury for the childish days when they lived on raw apples, to quote the expression of a journalist. The day when the bed-spread was torn to tatters marked a new epoch in her married life.

'Cursy was remarkable for his ferocious industry. Nobody suspects the source to which Paris owes the patch-and-powder eighteenth century vaudevilles that flooded the stage. Those thousand-and-one vaudevilles, which raised such an outcry among the *feuilletonistes*, were written at Mme. du Bruel's express desire. She insisted that her husband should purchase the hôtel on which she had spent so much, where she had

housed five hundred thousand francs' worth of furniture. Wherefore? Tullia never enters into explanations; she understands the sovereign woman's reason to admiration.

'"People made a good deal of fun of Cursy," said she; "but, as a matter of fact, he found this house in the eighteenth century rouge-box, powder, puffs, and spangles. He would never have thought of it but for me," she added, burying herself in her cushions in her fireside corner.

'She delivered herself thus on her return from a first night. Du Bruel's piece had succeeded, and she foresaw an avalanche of criticisms. Tullia had her At Homes. Every Monday she gave a tea-party; her society was as select as might be, and she neglected nothing that could make her house pleasant. There was bouillotte in one room, conversation in another, and sometimes a concert (always short) in the large drawing-room. None but the most eminent artists performed in her house. Tullia had so much good sense, that she attained to the most exquisite tact, and herein, in all probability, lay the secret of her ascendency over du Bruel; at any rate, he loved her with the love which use and wont at length makes indispensable to life. Every day adds another thread to the strong, irresistible, intangible web, which enmeshes the most delicate fancies, takes captive every most transient mood, and binding them together, holds a man captive hand and foot, heart and head.

'Tullia knew Cursy well; she knew every weak point in his armour, knew also how to heal his wounds.

'A passion of this kind is inscrutable for any observer, even for a man who prides himself, as I do, on a certain expertness. It is everywhere unfathomable; the dark depths in it are darker than in any other mystery; the colours confused even in the highest lights.

'Cursy was an old playwright, jaded by the life of the

theatrical world. He liked comfort; he liked a luxurious, affluent, easy existence; he enjoyed being a king in his own house; he liked to be host to a party of men of letters in a hôtel resplendent with royal luxury, with carefully chosen works of art shining in the setting. Tullia allowed du Bruel to enthrone himself amid the tribe; there were plenty of journalists whom it was easy enough to catch and ensnare; and, thanks to her evening parties and a well-timed loan here and there, Cursy was not attacked too seriously—his plays succeeded. For these reasons he would not have separated from Tullia for an empire. If she had been unfaithful, he would probably have passed it over, on condition that none of his accustomed joys should be retrenched; yet, strange to say, Tullia caused him no twinges on this account. No fancy was laid to her charge; if there had been any, she certainly had been very careful of appearances.

'"My dear fellow," du Bruel would say, laying down the law to us on the boulevard, "there is nothing like one of these women who have sown their wild oats and got over their passions. Such women as Claudine have lived their bachelor life; they have been over head and ears in pleasure, and make the most adorable wives that could be wished; they have nothing to learn, they are formed, they are not in the least prudish; they are well broken in, and indulgent. So I strongly recommend everybody to take the 'remains of a racer.' I am the most fortunate man on earth."

'Du Bruel said this to me himself with Bixiou there to hear it.

'"My dear fellow," said the caricaturist, "perhaps he is right to be in the wrong."

'About a week afterwards, du Bruel asked us to dine with him one Tuesday. That morning I went to see him on a piece of theatrical business, a case submitted to us for arbitration by the commission of dramatic authors. We were obliged to go out again; but before we started

he went to Claudine's room, knocked, as he always does, and asked for leave to enter.

'"We live in the grand style," said he, smiling; "we are free. Each is independent."

'We were admitted. Du Bruel spoke to Claudine. "I have asked a few people to dinner to-day——"

'"Just like you!" cried she. "You ask people without speaking to me; I count for nothing here.—Now" (taking me as arbitrator by a glance) "I ask you yourself. When a man has been so foolish as to live with a woman of my sort; for, after all, I was an opera dancer—yes, I ought always to remember that, if other people are to forget it—well, under those circumstances, a clever man seeking to raise his wife in public opinion would do his best to impose her upon the world as a remarkable woman, to justify the step he had taken by acknowledging that in some ways she was something more than ordinary women. The best way of compelling respect from others is to pay respect to her at home, and to leave her absolute mistress of the house. Well, and yet it is enough to waken one's vanity to see how frightened he is of seeming to listen to me. I must be in the right ten times over if he concedes a single point."

'(Emphatic negative gestures from du Bruel at every other word.)

'"Oh, yes, yes," she continued quickly, in answer to this mute dissent. "I know all about it, du Bruel, my dear, I that have been like a queen in my house all my life till I married you. My wishes were guessed, fulfilled, and more than fulfilled.—After all, I am thirty-five, and at five-and-thirty a woman cannot expect to be loved. Ah, if I were a girl of sixteen, if I had not lost something that is dearly bought at the Opéra, what attention you would pay me, M. du Bruel! I feel the most supreme contempt for men who boast that they can love and grow careless and neglectful in little things as time

grows on. You are short and insignificant, you see, du Bruel; you love to torment a woman; it is your only way of showing your strength. A Napoleon is ready to be swayed by the woman he loves; he loses nothing by it; but as for such as you, you believe that you are nothing apparently, you do not wish to be ruled.—Five-and-thirty, my dear boy," she continued, turning to me, "that is the clue to the riddle.—'No,' does he say again?—You know quite well that I am thirty-seven. I am very sorry, but just ask your friends to dine at the *Rocher de Cancale*. I *could* have them here, but I will not; they shall not come. And then perhaps my poor little monologue may engrave that salutary maxim, 'Each is master at home,' upon your memory. That is our charter," she added, laughing, with a return of the opera girl's giddiness and caprice.

'"Well, well, my dear little puss; there, there, never mind. We can manage to get on together," said du Bruel, and he kissed her hands, and we came away. But he was very wroth.

'The whole way from the Rue de la Victoire to the boulevard a perfect torrent of venomous words poured from his mouth like a waterfall in flood; but as the shocking language which he used on the occasion was quite unfit to print, the report is necessarily inadequate.

'"My dear fellow, I will leave that vile, shameless opera dancer, a worn-out jade that has been set spinning like a top to every operatic air; a foul hussy, an organ-grinder's monkey! Oh, my dear boy, you have taken up with an actress; may the notion of marrying your mistress never get a hold on you. It is a torment omitted from the hell of Dante, you see. Look here! I will beat her; I will give her a thrashing; I will give it to her! Poison of my life, she sent me off like a running footman."

'By this time we had reached the boulevard, and he

had worked himself up to such a pitch of fury that the words stuck in his throat.

'"I will kick the stuffing out of her!"

'"And why?"

'"My dear fellow, you will never know the thousand-and-one fancies that slut takes into her head. When I want to stay at home, she, forsooth, must go out; when I want to go out, she wants me to stop at home; and she spouts out arguments and accusations and reasoning and talks and talks till she drives you crazy. Right means any whim that they happen to take into their heads, and wrong means our notion. Overwhelm them with something that cuts their arguments to pieces—they hold their tongues and look at you as if you were a dead dog. My happiness indeed! I lead the life of a yard dog; I am a perfect slave. The little happiness that I have with her costs me dear. Confound it all. I will leave her everything and take myself off to a garret. Yes, a garret and liberty. I have not dared to have my own way once in these five years."

'But instead of going to his guests, Cursy strode up and down the boulevard between the Rue de Richelieu and the Rue du Mont Blanc, indulging in the most fearful imprecations, his unbounded language was most comical to hear. His paroxysm of fury in the street contrasted oddly with his peaceable demeanour in the house. Exercise assisted him to work off his nervous agitation and inward tempest. About two o'clock, on a sudden frantic impulse, he exclaimed—

'"These damned females never know what they want. I will wager my head now that if I go home and tell her that I have sent to ask my friends to dine with me at the *Rocher de Cancale*, she will not be satisfied though she made the arrangement herself.—But she will have gone off somewhere or other. I wonder whether there is something at the bottom of all this, an

assignation with some goat? No. In the bottom of her heart she loves me!"'

The Marquise could not help smiling.

'Ah, madame,' said Nathan, looking keenly at her, 'only women and prophets know how to turn faith to account.—Du Bruel would have me go home with him,' he continued, 'and we went slowly back. It was three o'clock. Before he appeared, he heard a stir in the kitchen, saw preparations going forward, and glanced at me as he asked the cook the reason of this.

'"Madame ordered dinner," said the woman. "Madame dressed and ordered a cab, and then she changed her mind and ordered it again for the theatre this evening."

'"Good," exclaimed du Bruel, "what did I tell you?"

'We entered the house stealthily. No one was there. We went from room to room until we reached a little boudoir, and came upon Tullia in tears. She dried her eyes without affectation, and spoke to du Bruel.

'"Send a note to the *Rocher de Cancale*," she said, "and ask your guests to dine here."

'She was dressed as only women of the theatre can dress, in a simply-made gown of some dainty material, neither too costly nor too common, graceful, and harmonious in outline and colouring; there was nothing conspicuous about her, nothing exaggerated—a word now dropping out of use, to be replaced by the word "artistic," used by fools as current coin. In short, Tullia looked like a gentlewoman. At thirty-seven she had reached the prime of a Frenchwoman's beauty. At this moment the celebrated oval of her face was divinely pale; she had laid her hat aside; I could see a faint down like the bloom of fruit softening the silken contours of a cheek itself so delicate. There was a pathetic charm about her face with its double cluster of fair hair; her brilliant

grey eyes were veiled by a mist of tears; her nose, delicately carved as a Roman cameo, with its quivering nostrils; her little mouth, like a child's even now; her long queenly throat, with the veins standing out upon it; her chin, flushed for the moment by some secret despair; the pink tips of her ears, the hands that trembled under her gloves, everything about her told of violent feeling. The feverish twitching of her eyebrows betrayed her pain. She looked sublime.

'Her first words had crushed du Bruel. She looked at us both, with that penetrating, impenetrable cat-like glance which only actresses and great ladies can use. Then she held out her hand to her husband.

'"Poor dear, you had scarcely gone before I blamed myself a thousand times over. It seemed to me that I had been horribly ungrateful; I told myself that I had been unkind.—Was I very unkind?" she asked, turning to me.—"Why not receive your friends? Is it not your house? Do you want to know the reason of it all? Well, I was afraid that I was not loved; and indeed I was halfway between repentance and the shame of going back. I read the newspapers, and saw that there was a first night at the Variétés, and I thought you had meant to give the dinner to a collaborator. Left to myself, I gave way, I dressed to hurry out after you—poor pet."

'Du Bruel looked at me triumphantly, not a vestige of a recollection of his orations *contra Tullia* in his mind.

'"Well, dearest, I have not spoken to any one of them," he said.

'"How well we understand each other!" quoth she.

'Even as she uttered those bewildering sweet words, I caught sight of something in her belt, the corner of a little note thrust sidewise into it; but I did not need that indication to tell me that Tullia's fantastic conduct was referable to occult causes. Woman, in my opinion,

is the most logical of created beings, the child alone excepted. In both we behold a sublime phenomenon, the unvarying triumph of one dominant, all-excluding thought. The child's thought changes every moment; but while it possesses him, he acts upon it with such ardour that others give way before him, fascinated by the ingenuity, the persistence of a strong desire. Woman is less changeable, but to call her capricious is a stupid insult. Whenever she acts, she is always swayed by one dominant passion; and wonderful it is to see how she makes that passion the very centre of her world.

'Tullia was irresistible; she twisted du Bruel round her fingers, the sky grew blue again, the evening was glorious. And ingenious writer of plays as he is, he never so much as saw that his wife had buried a trouble out of sight.

'"Such is life, my dear fellow," he said to me, "ups and downs and contrasts."

'"Especially life off the stage," I put in.

'"That is just what I mean," he continued. "Why, but for these violent emotions, one would be bored to death! Ah! that woman has the gift of rousing me."

'We went to the Variétés after dinner; but before we left the house I slipped into du Bruel's room, and on a shelf among a pile of waste papers found the copy of the *Petites-Affiches*, in which, agreeably to the reformed law, notice of the purchase of the house was inserted. The words stared me in the face—"At the request of Jean François du Bruel and Claudine Chaffaroux, his wife——" *Here* was the explanation of the whole matter. I offered my arm to Claudine, and allowed the guests to descend the stairs in front of us. When we were alone—"If I were La Palférine," I said, "I would not break an appointment."

'Gravely she laid her finger on her lips. She leant on my arm as we went downstairs, and looked at

me with almost something like happiness in her eyes because I knew La Palférine. Can you see the first idea that occurred to her? She thought of making a spy of me, but I turned her off with the light jesting talk of Bohemia.

'A month later, after a first performance of one of du Bruel's plays, we met in the vestibule of the theatre. It was raining; I went to call a cab. We had been delayed for a few minutes, so that there were no cabs in sight. Claudine scolded du Bruel soundly; and as we rolled through the streets (for she set me down at Florine's), she continued the quarrel with a series of most mortifying remarks.

'"What is this about?" I inquired.

'"Oh, my dear fellow, she blames me for allowing you to run out for a cab, and thereupon proceeds to wish for a carriage."

'"As a dancer," said she, "I have never been accustomed to use my feet except on the boards. If you have any spirit, you will turn out four more plays or so in a year; you will make up your mind that succeed they must, when you think of the end in view, and that your wife will not walk in the mud. It is a shame that I should have to ask for it. You ought to have guessed my continual discomfort during the five years since I married you."

'"I am quite willing," returned du Bruel. "But we shall ruin ourselves."

'"If you run into debt," she said, "my uncle's money will clear it off some day."

'"You are quite capable of leaving me the debts and taking the property."

'"Oh! is that the way you take it?" retorted she. "I have nothing more to say to you; such a speech stops my mouth."

'Whereupon du Bruel poured out his soul in excuses and protestations of love. Not a word did she say.

He took her hands, she allowed him to take them ; they were like ice, like a dead woman's hands. Tullia, you can understand, was playing to admiration the part of corpse that women can play to show you that they refuse their consent to anything and everything ; that for you they are suppressing soul, spirit, and life, and regard themselves as beasts of burden. Nothing so provokes a man with a heart as this strategy. Women can only use it with those who worship them.

'She turned to me. "Do you suppose," she said scornfully, "that a count would have uttered such an insult even if the thought had entered his mind ? For my misfortune I have lived with dukes, ambassadors, and great lords, and I know their ways. How intolerable it makes bourgeois life ! After all, a playwright is not a Rastignac nor a Rhétoré——"

'Du Bruel looked ghastly at this. Two days afterwards we met in the *foyer* at the Opéra, and took a few turns together. The conversation fell on Tullia.

'"Do not take my ravings on the boulevard too seriously," said he ; "I have a violent temper."

'For two winters I was a tolerably frequent visitor at du Bruel's house, and I followed Claudine's tactics closely. She had a splendid carriage. Du Bruel entered public life ; she made him abjure his Royalist opinions. He rallied himself; he took his place again in the administration ; the National Guard was discreetly canvassed, du Bruel was elected major, and behaved so valorously in a street riot, that he was decorated with the rosette of an officer of the Legion of Honour. He was appointed Master of Requests and head of a department. Uncle Chaffaroux died and left his niece forty thousand francs per annum, three-fourths of his fortune. Du Bruel became a deputy ; but beforehand, to save the necessity of re-election, he secured his nomination to the Council of State. He reprinted diverse archæological treatises, a couple of political pamphlets, and a statistical work, by

way of pretext for his appointment to one of the obliging academies of the Institut. At this moment he is a Commander of the Legion, and (after fishing in the troubled waters of political intrigue) has quite recently been made a peer of France and a count. As yet our friend does not venture to bear his honours; his wife merely puts "La Comtesse du Bruel" on her cards. The sometime playwright has the Order of Leopold, the Order of Isabella, the Cross of Saint-Vladimir, second class, the Order of Civil Merit of Bavaria, the Papal Order of the Golden Spur,—all the lesser orders, in short, beside the Grand Cross.

'Three months ago Claudine drove to La Palférine's door in her splendid carriage with its armorial bearings. Du Bruel's grandfather was a farmer of taxes ennobled towards the end of Louis Quatorze's reign. Chérin composed his coat-of-arms for him, so the Count's coronet looks not amiss above a scutcheon innocent of Imperial absurdities. In this way, in the short space of three years, Claudine had carried out the programme laid down for her by the charming, light-hearted La Palférine.

'One day, just a month ago, she climbed the miserable staircase to her lover's lodging; climbed in her glory, dressed like a real countess of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, to our friend's garret. La Palférine, seeing her, said, "You have made a peeress of yourself I know. But it is too late, Claudine; every one is talking just now about the Southern Cross, I should like to see it!"

'"I will get it for you."

'La Palférine burst into a peal of Homeric laughter.

'"Most distinctly," he returned, "I do *not* wish to have a woman as ignorant as a carp for my mistress, a woman that springs like a flying fish from the greenroom of the Opéra to Court, for I should like to see you at the Court of the Citizen King."

'She turned to me.


W Boucher

'"What is the Southern Cross?" she asked, in a sad, downcast voice.

'I was struck with admiration for this indomitable love, outdoing the most ingenious marvels of fairy tales in real life—a love that would spring over a precipice to find a roc's egg, or to gather the singing flower. I explained that the Southern Cross was a nebulous constellation even brighter than the Milky Way, arranged in the form of a cross, and that it could only be seen in southern latitudes.

'"Very well, Charles, let us go," said she.

'La Palférine, ferocious though he was, had tears in his eyes; but what a look there was in Claudine's face, what a note in her voice! I have seen nothing like the thing that followed, not even in the supreme touch of a great actor's art; nothing to compare with her movement when she saw the hard eyes softened in tears; Claudine sank upon her knees and kissed La Palférine's pitiless hand. He raised her with his grand manner, his "Rusticoli air," as he calls it—"There, child!" he said, "I will do something for you; I will put you—in my will."

'Well,' concluded Nathan, 'I ask myself sometimes whether du Bruel is really deceived. Truly there is nothing more comic, nothing stranger than the sight of a careless young fellow ruling a married couple, his slightest whims received as law, the weightiest decisions revoked at a word from him. That dinner incident, as you can see, is repeated times without number, it interferes with important matters. Still, but for Claudine's caprices, du Bruel would be de Cursy still, one vaudevillist among five hundred; whereas he is in the House of Peers.'

'You will change the names, I hope!' said Nathan, addressing Mme. de la Baudraye.

'I should think so! I have only set names to the

masks for you. My dear Nathan,' she added in the poet's ear, 'I know another case in which the wife takes du Bruel's place.'

'And the catastrophe?' queried Lousteau, returning just at the end of Mme. de la Baudraye's story.

'I do not believe in catastrophes. One has to invent such good ones to show that art is quite a match for chance; and nobody reads a book twice, my friend, except for the details.'

'But there is a catastrophe,' persisted Nathan.

'What is it?'

'The Marquise de Rochefide is infatuated with Charles Edward. My story excited her curiosity.'

'Oh, unhappy woman!' cried Mme. de la Baudraye.

'Not so unhappy,' said Nathan, 'for Maxime de Trailles and La Palférine have brought about a rupture between the Marquis and Mme. Schontz, and they mean to make it up between Arthur and Béatrix.'

1839-1845.

A MAN OF BUSINESS

To Monsieur le Baron James de Rothschild, Banker and Austrian Consul-General at Paris.

The word *lorette* is a euphemism invented to describe the status of a personage, or a personage of a status, of which it is awkward to speak; the French Académie, in its modesty, having omitted to supply a definition out of regard for the age of its forty members. Whenever a new word comes to supply the place of an unwieldy circumlocution, its fortune is assured; the word *lorette* has passed into the language of every class of society, even where the lorette herself will never gain an entrance. It was only invented in 1840, and derived beyond a doubt from the agglomeration of such swallows' nests about the Church of Our Lady of Loretto. This information is for etymologists only. Those gentlemen would not be so often in a quandary if mediæval writers had only taken such pains with details of contemporary manners as we take in these days of analysis and description.

Mlle. Turquet, or Malaga, for she is better known by her pseudonym,[1] was one of the earliest parishioners of that charming church. At the time to which this story belongs, that lighthearted and lively damsel gladdened the existence of a notary with a wife somewhat too bigoted, rigid, and frigid for domestic happiness.

Now, it so fell out that one Carnival evening Maître

[1] See *La fausse Maîtresse.*

Cardot was entertaining guests at Mlle. Turquet's house —Desroches the attorney, Bixiou of the caricatures, Lousteau the journalist, Nathan, and others; it is quite unnecessary to give any further description of these personages, all bearers of illustrious names in the *Comédie Humaine*. Young La Palférine, in spite of his title of Count and his great descent, which, alas! means a great descent in fortune likewise, had honoured the notary's little establishment with his presence.

At dinner, in such a house, one does not expect to meet the patriarchal beef, the skinny fowl and salad of domestic and family life, nor is there any attempt at the hypocritical conversation of drawing-rooms furnished with highly respectable matrons. When, alas! will respectability be charming? When will the women in good society vouchsafe to show rather less of their shoulders and rather more wit or geniality? Marguerite Turquet, the Aspasia of the Cirque-Olympique, is one of those frank, very living personalities to whom all is forgiven, such unconscious sinners are they, such intelligent penitents; of such as Malaga one might ask, like Cardot—a witty man enough, albeit a notary —to be well 'deceived.' And yet you must not think that any enormities were committed. Desroches and Cardot were good fellows grown too grey in the profession not to feel at ease with Bixiou, Lousteau, Nathan, and young La Palférine. And they on their side had too often had recourse to their legal advisers, and knew them too well to try to 'draw them out,' in lorette language.

Conversation, perfumed with seven cigars, at first was as fantastic as a kid let loose, but finally it settled down upon the strategy of the constant war waged in Paris between creditors and debtors.

Now, if you will be so good as to recall the history and antecedents of the guests, you will know that in all Paris you could scarcely find a group of men with more experience in this matter; the professional men on one

hand, and the artists on the other, were something in the position of magistrates and criminals hobnobbing together. A set of Bixiou's drawings to illustrate life in the debtors' prison, led the conversation to take this particular turn; and from debtors' prisons they went to debts.

It was midnight. They had broken up into little knots round the table and before the fire, and gave themselves up to the burlesque fun which is only possible or comprehensible in Paris and in that particular region which is bounded by the Faubourg Montmartre, the Rue Chaussée d'Antin, the upper end of the Rue de Navarin and the line of the boulevards.

In ten minutes' time they had come to an end of all the deep reflections, all the moralisings, small and great, all the bad puns made on a subject already exhausted by Rabelais three hundred and fifty years ago. It is not a little to their credit that the pyrotechnic display was cut short with a final squib from Malaga.

'It all goes to the shoemakers,' she said. 'I left a milliner because she failed twice with my hats. The vixen has been here twenty-seven times to ask for twenty francs. She did not know that we never have twenty francs. One has a thousand francs, or one sends to one's notary for five hundred; but twenty francs I have never had in my life. My cook and my maid may, perhaps, have so much between them; but for my own part, I have nothing but credit, and I should lose that if I took to borrowing small sums. If I were to ask for twenty francs, I should have nothing to distinguish me from my colleagues that walk the boulevard.'

'Is the milliner paid?' asked La Palférine.

'Oh, come now, are you turning stupid?' said she, with a wink. 'She came this morning for the twenty-seventh time, that is how I came to mention it.'

'What did you do?' asked Desroches.

'I took pity upon her, and—ordered a little hat that

I have just invented, a quite new shape. If Mlle. Amanda succeeds with it, she will say no more about the money, her fortune is made.'

'In my opinion,' put in Desroches, 'the finest things that I have seen in a duel of this kind give those who know Paris a far better picture of the city than all the fancy portraits that they paint. Some of you think that you know a thing or two,' he continued, glancing round at Nathan, Bixiou, La Palférine, and Lousteau, 'but the king of the ground is a certain Count, now busy ranging himself. In his time, he was supposed to be the cleverest, adroitest, canniest, boldest, stoutest, most subtle, and experienced of all the pirates, who, equipped with fine manners, yellow kid gloves, and cabs, have ever sailed or ever will sail upon the stormy sea of Paris. He fears neither God nor man. He applies in private life the principles that guide the English Cabinet. Up to the time of his marriage, his life was one continual war, like—Lousteau's, for instance. I was, and am still his solicitor.'

'And the first letter of his name is Maxime de Trailles,' said La Palférine.

'For that matter, he has paid every one, and injured no one,' continued Desroches. 'But as our friend Bixiou was saying just now, it is a violation of the liberty of the subject to be made to pay in March when you have no mind to pay till October. By virtue of this article of his particular code, Maxime regarded a creditor's scheme for making him pay at once as a swindler's trick. It was long since he had grasped the significance of the bill of exchange in all its bearings, direct and remote. A young man once, in my place, called a bill of exchange the "asses' bridge" in his hearing. "No," said he, "it is the Bridge of Sighs; it is the shortest way to an execution." Indeed, his knowledge of commercial law was so complete, that a professional could not have taught him anything. At that time he had nothing, as you know. His carriage and horses were jobbed; he lived

in his valet's house; and, by the way, he will be a hero to his valet to the end of the chapter, even after the marriage that he proposes to make. He belonged to three clubs, and dined at one of them whenever he did not dine out. As a rule, he was to be found very seldom at his own address——'

'He once said to me,' interrupted La Palférine, '"My one affectation is the pretence that I make of living in the Rue Pigalle."'

'Well,' resumed Desroches, 'he was one of the combatants; and now for the other. You have heard more or less talk of one Claparon?'

'Had hair like this!' cried Bixiou, ruffling his locks till they stood on end. Gifted with the same talent for mimicking absurdities which Chopin the pianist possesses to so high a degree, he proceeded forthwith to represent the character with startling truth.

'He rolls his head like this when he speaks; he was once a commercial traveller; he has been all sorts of things——'

'Well, he was born to travel, for at this minute, as I speak, he is on the sea on his way to America,' said Desroches. 'It is his only chance, for in all probability he will be condemned by default as a fraudulent bankrupt next session.'

'Very much at sea!' exclaimed Malaga.

'For six or seven years this Claparon acted as man of straw, cat's-paw, and scapegoat to two friends of ours, du Tillet and Nucingen; but in 1829 his part was so well known that——'

'Our friends dropped him,' put in Bixiou.

'They left him to his fate at last, and he wallowed in the mire,' continued Desroches. 'In 1833 he went into partnership with one Cérizet——'

'What! he that promoted a joint-stock company so nicely that the Sixth Chamber cut short his career with a couple of years in jail?' asked the lorette.

'The same. Under the Restoration, between 1823 and 1827, Cérizet's occupation consisted in first putting his name intrepidly to various paragraphs, on which the public prosecutor fastened with avidity, and subsequently marching off to prison. A man could make a name for himself with small expense in those days. The Liberal party called their provincial champion "the courageous Cérizet," and towards 1828 so much zeal received its reward in "general interest."

'"General interest" is a kind of civic crown bestowed on the deserving by the daily press. Cérizet tried to discount the "general interest" taken in him. He came to Paris, and, with some help from capitalists in the Opposition, started as a broker, and conducted financial operations to some extent, the capital being found by a man in hiding, a skilful gambler who overreached himself, and in consequence, in July 1830, his capital foundered in the shipwreck of the Government.'

'Oh! it was he whom we used to call the System,' cried Bixiou.

'Say no harm of him, poor fellow,' protested Malaga. 'D'Estourny was a good sort.'

'You can imagine the part that a ruined man was sure to play in 1830 when his name in politics was "the courageous Cérizet." He was sent off into a very snug little sub-prefecture. Unluckily for him, it is one thing to be in opposition—any missile is good enough to throw, so long as the fight lasts; but quite another to be in office. Three months later, he was obliged to send in his resignation. Had he not taken it into his head to attempt to win popularity? Still, as he had done nothing as yet to imperil his title of "courageous Cérizet," the Government proposed by way of compensation that he should manage a newspaper; nominally an Opposition paper, but Ministerialist *in petto*. So the fall of this noble nature was really due to the Government. To Cérizet, as manager of the

paper, it was rather too evident that he was as a bird perched on a rotten bough; and then it was that he promoted that nice little joint-stock company, and thereby secured a couple of years in prison; he was caught, while more ingenious swindlers succeeded in catching the public.'

'We are acquainted with the more ingenious,' said Bixiou; 'let us say no ill of the poor fellow; he was nabbed; Couture allowed them to squeeze his cash-box; who would ever have thought it of him?'

'At all events, Cérizet was a low sort of fellow, a good deal damaged by low debauchery. Now for the duel I spoke about. Never did two tradesmen of the worst type, with the worst manners, the lowest pair of villains imaginable, go into partnership in a dirtier business. Their stock-in-trade consisted of the peculiar idiom of the man about town, the audacity of poverty, the cunning that comes of experience, and a special knowledge of Parisian capitalists, their origin, connections, acquaintances, and intrinsic value. This partnership of two 'dabblers' (let the Stock Exchange term pass, for it is the only word which describes them), this partnership of dabblers did not last very long. They fought like famished curs over every bit of garbage.

'The earlier speculations of the firm of Cérizet and Claparon were, however, well planned. The two scamps joined forces with Barbet, Chaboisseau, Samanon, and usurers of that stamp, and bought up hopelessly bad debts.

'Claparon's place of business at that time was a cramped entresol in the Rue Chabannais—five rooms at a rent of seven hundred francs at most. Each partner slept in a little closet, so carefully closed from prudence, that my head-clerk could never get inside. The furniture of the other three rooms—an ante-chamber, a waiting-room, and a private office—would not have fetched three hundred francs altogether at a distress-

warrant sale. You know enough of Paris to know the look of it; the stuffed horsehair-covered chairs, a table covered with a green cloth, a trumpery clock between a couple of candle sconces, growing tarnished under glass shades, the small gilt-framed mirror over the chimney-piece, and in the grate a charred stick or two of firewood which had lasted them for two winters, as my head-clerk put it. As for the office, you can guess what it was like—more letter-files than business letters, a set of common pigeon-holes for either partner, a cylinder desk, empty as the cash-box, in the middle of the room, and a couple of armchairs on either side of a coal fire. The carpet on the floor was bought cheap at second-hand (like the bills and bad debts). In short, it was the mahogany furniture of furnished apartments which usually descends from one occupant of chambers to another during fifty years of service. Now you know the pair of antagonists.

'During the first three months of a partnership dissolved four months later in a bout of fisticuffs, Cérizet and Claparon bought up two thousand francs' worth of bills bearing Maxime's signature (since Maxime is his name), and filled a couple of letter files to bursting with judgments, appeals, orders of the court, distress-warrant, application for stay of proceedings, and all the rest of it; to put it briefly, they had bills for three thousand two hundred francs odd centimes, for which they had given five hundred francs; the transfer being made under private seal, with special power of attorney, to save the expense of registration. Now it so happened at this juncture, Maxime, being of ripe age, was seized with one of the fancies peculiar to the man of fifty——'

'Antonia!' exclaimed La Palférine. 'That Antonia whose fortune I made by writing to ask for a tooth-brush!'

'Her real name is Chocardelle,' said Malaga, not over well pleased by the fine-sounding pseudonym.

'The same,' continued Desroches.

'It was the only mistake Maxime ever made in his life. But what would you have, no vice is absolutely perfect?' put in Bixiou.

'Maxime had still to learn what sort of a life a man may be led into by a girl of eighteen when she is minded to take a header from her honest garret into a sumptuous carriage; it is a lesson that all statesmen should take to heart. At this time, de Marsay had just been employing his friend, our friend de Trailles, in the high comedy of politics. Maxime had looked high for his conquests; he had no experience of untitled women; and at fifty years he felt that he had a right to take a bite of a little so-called wild fruit, much as a sportsman will halt under a peasant's apple-tree. So the Count found a reading-room for Mlle. Chocardelle, a rather smart little place to be had cheap, as usual——'

'Pooh!' said Nathan. 'She did not stay in it six months. She was too handsome to keep a reading-room.'

'Perhaps you are the father of her child?' suggested the lorette.

Desroches resumed.

'Since the firm bought up Maxime's debts, Cérizet's likeness to a bailiff's officer grew more and more striking, and one morning after seven fruitless attempts he succeeded in penetrating into the Count's presence. Suzon, the old man-servant, albeit he was by no means in his novitiate, at last mistook the visitor for a petitioner, come to propose a thousand crowns if Maxime would obtain a license to sell postage stamps for a young lady. Suzon, without the slightest suspicion of the little scamp, a thoroughbred Paris street-boy into whom prudence had been rubbed by repeated personal experience of the police-courts, induced his master to receive him. Can you see the man of business, with an uneasy eye, a bald forehead, and scarcely any hair on his head, standing in his threadbare jacket and muddy boots——'

'What a picture of a Dun!' cried Lousteau.

'——standing before the Count, that image of flaunting Debt, in his blue flannel dressing-gown, slippers worked by some marquise or other, trousers of white woollen stuff, and a dazzling shirt? There he stood, with a gorgeous cap on his black dyed hair, playing with the tassels at his waist——'

''Tis a bit of genre for anybody who knows the pretty little morning room, hung with silk and full of valuable paintings, where Maxime breakfasts,' said Nathan. 'You tread on a Smyrna carpet, you admire the sideboards filled with curiosities and rarities fit to make a King of Saxony envious——'

'Now for the scene itself,' said Desroches, and the deepest silence followed.

'"Monsieur le Comte," began Cérizet, "I have come from a M. Charles Claparon, who used to be a banker——"

'"Ah! poor devil, and what does he want with me?"

'"Well, he is at present your creditor for a matter of three thousand two hundred francs, seventy-five centimes, principal, interest, and costs——'

'"Coutelier's business?" put in Maxime, who knew his affairs as a pilot knows his coast.

'"Yes, Monsieur le Comte," said Cérizet with a bow. "I have come to ask your intentions."

'"I shall only pay when the fancy takes me," returned Maxime, and he rang for Suzon. "It was very rash of Claparon to buy up bills of mine without speaking to me beforehand. I am sorry for him, for he did so very well for such a long time as a man of straw for friends of mine. I always said that a man must really be weak in his intellect to work for men that stuff themselves with millions, and to serve them so faithfully for such low wages. And now here he gives me another proof of his stupidity! Yes, men deserve what they get. It is your own doing whether you get a crown

on your forehead or a bullet through your head ; whether you are a millionaire or a porter, justice is always done you. I cannot help it, my dear fellow ; I myself am not a king, I stick to my principles. I have no pity for those that put me to expense or do not know their business as creditors.—Suzon ! my tea ! Do you see this gentleman ?" he continued when the man came in. "Well, you have allowed yourself to be taken in, poor old boy. This gentleman is a creditor ; you ought to have known him by his boots. No friend nor foe of mine, nor those that are neither and want something of me, come to see me on foot.—My dear M. Cérizet, do you understand ? You will not wipe your boots on my carpet again" (looking as he spoke at the mud that whitened the enemy's soles). "Convey my compliments and sympathy to Claparon, poor buffer, for I shall file this business under the letter Z."

'All this with an easy good-humour fit to give a virtuous citizen the colic.

'"You are wrong, Monsieur le Comte," retorted Cérizet, in a slightly peremptory tone. "We will be paid in full, and that in a way which you may not like. That was why I came to you first in a friendly spirit, as is right and fit between gentlemen——"

'"Oh ! so that is how you understand it ?" began Maxime, enraged by this last piece of presumption. There was something of Talleyrand's wit in the insolent retort, if you have quite grasped the contrast between the two men and their costumes. Maxime scowled and looked full at the intruder ; Cérizet not merely endured the glare of cold fury, but even returned it, with an icy, cat-like malignance and fixity of gaze.

'"Very good, sir, go out——"

'Very well, good day, Monsieur le Comte. We shall be quits before six months are out."

'"If you can steal the amount of your bill, which is

legally due I own, I shall be indebted to you, sir," replied Maxime. "You will have taught me a new precaution to take. I am very much your servant."

'"Monsieur le Comte," said Cérizet, "it is I, on the contrary, who am yours."

'Here was an explicit, forcible, confident declaration on either side. A couple of tigers confabulating, with the prey before them, and a fight impending, would have been no finer and no shrewder than this pair; the insolent fine gentleman as great a blackguard as the other in his soiled and mud-stained clothes.

'Which will you lay your money on?' asked Desroches, looking round at an audience, surprised to find how deeply it was interested.

'A pretty story!' cried Malaga. 'My dear boy, go on, I beg of you. This goes to one's heart.'

'Nothing commonplace could happen between two fighting-cocks of that calibre,' added La Palférine.

'Pooh!' cried Malaga, 'I will wager my cabinet-maker's invoice (the fellow is dunning me) that the little toad was too many for Maxime.'

'I bet on Maxime,' said Cardot. 'Nobody ever caught him napping.'

Desroches drank off a glass that Malaga handed to him.

'Mlle. Chocardelle's reading-room,' he continued, after a pause, 'was in the Rue Coquenard, just a step or two from the Rue Pigalle where Maxime was living. The said Mlle. Chocardelle lived at the back on the garden side of the house, beyond a big, dark place where the books were kept. Antonia left her aunt to look after the business——'

'Had she an aunt even then?' exclaimed Malaga. 'Hang it all, Maxime did things handsomely.'

'Alas! it was a real aunt,' said Desroches; 'her name was—let me see——'

'Ida Bonamy,' said Bixiou.

'So as Antonia's aunt took a good deal of the work

off her hands, she went to bed late and lay late of a morning, never showing her face at the desk until the afternoon, some time between two and four. From the very first her appearance was enough to draw custom. Several elderly men in the quarter used to come, among them a retired coach-builder, one Croizeau. Beholding this miracle of female loveliness through the window-panes, he took it into his head to read the newspapers in the beauty's reading-room; and a sometime custom-house officer, named Denisart, with a ribbon in his button-hole, followed the example. Croizeau chose to look upon Denisart as a rival. "*Môsieur*," he said afterwards, "I did not know what to buy for you!'

'That speech should give you an idea of the man. The Sieur Croizeau happens to belong to a particular class of old man which should be known as "Coquerels" since Henri Monnier's time; so well did Monnier render the piping voice, the little mannerisms, little queue, little sprinkling of powder, little movements of the head, prim little manner, and tripping gait in the part of Coquerel in *La Famille Improvisée*. This Croizeau used to hand over his halfpence with a flourish and a "There, fair lady!"

'Mme. Ida Bonamy the aunt was not long in finding out through the servant that Croizeau, by popular report of the neighbourhood of the Rue de Buffault, where he lived, was a man of exceeding stinginess, possessed of forty thousand francs per annum. A week after the instalment of the charming librarian he was delivered of a pun—

'"You lend me books (*livres*), but I give you plenty of francs in return," said he.

'A few days later he put on a knowing little air, as much as to say, "I know you are engaged, but my turn will come one day; I am a widower."

'He always came arrayed in fine linen, a cornflower blue coat, a paduasoy waistcoat, black trousers, and black ribbon bows on the double soled shoes that creaked

like an abbé's; he always held a fourteen franc silk hat in his hand.

'"I am old and I have no children," he took occasion to confide to the young lady some few days after Cérizet's visit to Maxime. "I hold my relations in horror. They are peasants born to work in the fields. Just imagine it, I came up from the country with six francs in my pocket, and made my fortune here. I am not proud. A pretty woman is my equal. Now would it not be nicer to be Mme. Croizeau for some years to come than to do a Count's pleasure for a twelvemonth? He will go off and leave you some time or other; and when that day comes, you will think of me . . . your servant, my pretty lady!"

'All this was simmering below the surface. The slightest approach at love-making was made quite on the sly. Not a soul suspected that the trim little old fogey was smitten with Antonia; and so prudent was the elderly lover, that no rival could have guessed anything from his behaviour in the reading-room. For a couple of months Croizeau watched the retired custom-house official; but before the third month was out he had good reason to believe that his suspicions were groundless. He exerted his ingenuity to scrape an acquaintance with Denisart, came up with him in the street, and at length seized his opportunity to remark, "It is a fine day, sir!"

'Whereupon the retired official responded with, "Austerlitz weather, sir. I was there myself—I was wounded indeed, I won my Cross on that glorious day."

'And so from one thing to another the two drifted wrecks of the Empire struck up an acquaintance. Little Croizeau was attached to the Empire through his connection with Napoleon's sisters. He had been their coach-builder, and had frequently dunned them for money; so he gave out that he "had had relations with the Imperial family." Maxime, duly informed by Antonia of the "nice old man's" proposals (for so

the aunt called Croizeau), wished to see him. Cérizet's declaration of war had so far taken effect that he of the yellow kid gloves was studying the position of every piece, however insignificant, upon the board; and it so happened that at the mention of that "nice old man," an ominous tinkling sounded in his ears. One evening, therefore, Maxime seated himself among the book-shelves in the dimly lighted back room, reconnoitred the seven or eight customers through the chink between the green curtains, and took the little coachbuilder's measure. He gauged the man's infatuation, and was very well satisfied to find that the varnished doors of a tolerably sumptuous future were ready to turn at a word from Antonia so soon as his own fancy had passed off.

'"And that other one yonder?" asked he, pointing out the stout fine-looking elderly man with the Cross of the Legion of Honour. "Who is he?"

'"A retired custom-house officer."

'"The cut of his countenance is not reassuring," said Maxime, beholding the Sieur Denisart.

'And indeed the old soldier held himself upright as a steeple. His head was remarkable for the amount of powder and pomatum bestowed upon it; he looked almost like a postillion at a fancy ball. Underneath that felted covering, moulded to the top of the wearer's cranium, appeared an elderly profile, half-official, half-soldierly, with a comical admixture of arrogance,—altogether something like caricatures of the *Constitutionnel.* The sometime official finding that age, and hair-powder, and the conformation of his spine made it impossible to read a word without spectacles, sat displaying a very creditable expanse of chest with all the pride of an old man with a mistress. Like old General Montcornet, that pillar of the Vaudeville, he wore earrings. Denisart was partial to blue; his roomy trousers and well-worn greatcoat were both of blue cloth.

'"How long is it since that old fogey came here?" inquired Maxime, thinking that he saw danger in the spectacles.

'"Oh, from the beginning," returned Antonia, "pretty nearly two months ago now.'

'"Good," said Maxime to himself, "Cérizet only came to me a month ago.—Just get him to talk," he added in Antonia's ear; "I want to hear his voice."

'"Pshaw," said she, "that is not so easy. He never says a word to me."

'"Then why does he come here?" demanded Maxime.

'"For a queer reason," returned the fair Antonia. "In the first place, although he is sixty-nine, he has a fancy; and because he is sixty-nine, he is as methodical as a clock face. Every day at five o'clock the old gentleman goes to dine with *her* in the Rue de la Victoire. (I am sorry for her.) Then, at six o'clock, he comes here, reads steadily at the papers for four hours, and goes back at ten o'clock. Daddy Croizeau says that he knows M. Denisart's motives, and approves his conduct; and in his place, he would do the same. So I know exactly what to expect. If ever I am Mme. Croizeau, I shall have four hours to myself between six and ten o'clock."

'Maxime looked through the directory, and found the following reassuring item:—

'"DENISART, * retired custom-house officer, Rue de la Victoire."

'His uneasiness vanished.

'Gradually the Sieur Denisart and the Sieur Croizeau began to exchange confidences. Nothing so binds two men together as a similarity of views in the matter of womankind. Daddy Croizeau went to dine with "M. Denisart's fair lady," as he called her. And here I must make a somewhat important observation.

'The reading-room had been paid for half in cash,

half in bills signed by the said Mlle. Chocardelle. The *quart d'heure de Rabelais* arrived; the Count had no money. So the first bill of three thousand-franc bills was met by the amiable coach-builder; that old scoundrel Denisart having recommended him to secure himself with a mortgage on the reading-room.

'"For my own part," said Denisart, "I have seen pretty doings from pretty women. So, in all cases, even when I have lost my head, I am always on my guard with a woman. There is this creature, for instance; I am madly in love with her; but this is not her furniture; no, it belongs to me. The lease is taken out in my name."

'You know Maxime! He thought the coach-builder uncommonly green. Croizeau might pay all three bills, and get nothing for a long while; for Maxime felt more infatuated with Antonia than ever.'

'I can well believe it,' said La Palférine. 'She is the *bella Imperia* of our day.'

'With her rough skin!' exclaimed Malaga; 'so rough, that she ruins herself in bran baths!'

'Croizeau spoke with a coach-builder's admiration of the sumptuous furniture provided by the amorous Denisart as a setting for his fair one, describing it all in detail with diabolical complacency for Antonia's benefit,' continued Desroches. 'The ebony chests inlaid with mother-of-pearl and gold wire, the Brussels carpets, a mediæval bedstead worth three thousand francs, a Boule clock, candelabra in the four corners of the dining-room, silk curtains, on which Chinese patience had wrought pictures of birds, and hangings over the doors, worth more than the portress that opened them.

'"And that is what *you* ought to have, my pretty lady.—And that is what I should like to offer you," he would conclude. "I am quite aware that you scarcely care a bit about me; but, at my age, we cannot expect too much. Judge how much I love you; I have lent

you a thousand francs. I must confess that, in all my born days, I have not lent anybody *that* much——"

'He held out his penny as he spoke, with the important air of a man that gives a learned demonstration.

'That evening at the Variétés, Antonia spoke to the Count.

'"A reading-room is very dull, all the same,' said she; "I feel that I have no sort cf taste for that kind of life, and I see no future in it. It is only fit for a widow that wishes to keep body and soul together, or for some hideously ugly thing that fancies she can catch a husband with a little finery."

'"It was your own choice," returned the Count. Just at that moment, in came Nucingen, of whom Maxime, king of lions (the "yellow kid gloves" were the lions of that day) had won three thousand francs the evening before. Nucingen had come to pay his gaming debt.

'"Ein writ of attachment haf shoost peen served on me by der order of dot teufel Glabaron," he said, seeing Maxime's astonishment.

'"Oh, so that is how they are going to work, is it?" cried Maxime. "They are not up to much, that pair——"

'"It makes not," said the banker, "bay dem, for dey may apply demselfs to oders pesides, und do you harm. I dake dees bretty voman to vitness dot I haf baid you dees morning, long pefore dat writ vas serfed."'

'Queen of the boards,' smiled La Palférine, looking at Malaga, 'thou art about to lose thy bet.'

'Once, a long time ago, in a similar case,' resumed Desroches, 'a too honest debtor took fright at the idea of a solemn declaration in a court of law, and declined to pay Maxime after notice was given. That time we made it hot for the creditor by piling on writs of attachment, so as to absorb the whole amount in costs——'

'Oh, what is that?' cried Malaga; 'it all sounds like gibberish to me. As you thought the sturgeon so excellent at dinner, let me take out the value of the sauce in lessons in chicanery.'

'Very well,' said Desroches. 'Suppose that a man owes you money, and your creditors serve a writ of attachment upon him; there is nothing to prevent all your other creditors from doing the same thing. And now what does the court do when all the creditors make application for orders to pay? *The court divides the whole sum attached, proportionately among them all.* That division, made under the eye of a magistrate, is what we call a *contribution.* If you owe ten thousand francs, and your creditors issue writs of attachment on a debt due to you of a thousand francs, each one of them gets so much per cent., "so much in the pound," in legal phrase; so much (that means) in proportion to the amounts severally claimed by the creditors. But—the creditors cannot touch the money without a special order from the clerk of the court. Do you guess what all this work drawn up by a judge and prepared by attorneys must mean? It means a quantity of stamped paper full of diffuse lines and blanks, the figures almost lost in vast spaces of completely empty ruled columns. The first proceeding is to deduct the costs. Now, as the costs are precisely the same whether the amount attached is one thousand or one million francs, it is not difficult to eat up three thousand francs (for instance) in costs, especially if you can manage to raise counter applications.'

'And an attorney always manages to do it,' said Cardot. 'How many a time one of you has come to me with, "What is there to be got out of the case?"'

'It is particularly easy to manage it if the debtor eggs you on to run up costs till they eat up the amount. And, as a rule, the Count's creditors took nothing by

that move, and were out of pocket in law and personal expenses. To get money out of so experienced a debtor as the Count, a creditor should really be in a position uncommonly difficult to reach; it is a question of being creditor and debtor both, for then you are legally entitled to work the confusion of rights, in law language——'

'To the confusion of the debtor?' asked Malaga, lending an attentive ear to this discourse.

'No, the confusion of rights of debtor and creditor, and pay yourself through your own hands. So Claparon's innocence in merely issuing writs of attachment eased the Count's mind. As he came back from the Variétés with Antonia, he was so much the more taken with the idea of selling the reading-room to pay off the last two thousand francs of the purchase-money, because he did not care to have his name made public as a partner in such a concern. So he adopted Antonia's plan. Antonia wished to reach the higher ranks of her calling, with splendid rooms, a maid, and a carriage; in short, she wanted to rival our charming hostess, for instance——'

'She was not woman enough for that,' cried the famous beauty of the Circus; 'still, she ruined young d'Esgrignon very neatly.'

'Ten days afterwards, little Croizeau, perched on his dignity, said almost exactly the same thing, for the fair Antonia's benefit,' continued Desroches.

'"Child," said he, "your reading-room is a hole of a place. You will lose your complexion; the gas will ruin your eyesight. You ought to come out of it; and, look here, let us take advantage of an opportunity. I have found a young lady for you that asks no better than to buy your reading-room. She is a ruined woman with nothing before her but a plunge into the river; but she has four thousand francs in cash, and the best thing to do is to turn them to account, so as to feed and educate a couple of children."

'"Very well. It is kind of you, Daddy Croizeau," said Antonia.

'"Oh, I shall be much kinder before I have done. Just imagine it, poor M. Denisart has been worried into the jaundice! Yes, it has gone to the liver, as it usually does with susceptible old men. It is a pity he feels things so. I told him so myself; I said, 'Be passionate, there is no harm in that, but as for taking things to heart—draw the line at that! It is the way to kill yourself.'—Really, I would not have expected him to take on so about it; a man that has sense enough and experience enough to keep away as he does while he digests his dinner——"

'"But what is the matter?" inquired Mlle. Chocardelle.

'"That little baggage with whom I dined has cleared out and left him! . . . Yes. Gave him the slip without any warning but a letter, in which the spelling was all to seek."

'"There, Daddy Croizeau, you see what comes of boring a woman——"

'"It is indeed a lesson, my pretty lady," said the guileful Croizeau. "Meanwhile, I have never seen a man in such a state. Our friend Denisart cannot tell his left hand from his right; he will not go back to look at the 'scene of his happiness,' as he calls it. He has so thoroughly lost his wits, that he proposes that I should buy all Hortense's furniture (Hortense was her name) for four thousand francs."

'"A pretty name," said Antonia.

'"Yes. Napoleon's step-daughter was called Hortense. I built carriages for her, as you know."

'"Very well, I will see," said cunning Antonia; "begin by sending this young woman to me."

'Antonia hurried off to see the furniture, and came back fascinated. She brought Maxime under the spell of antiquarian enthusiasm. That very evening the

Count agreed to the sale of the reading-room. The establishment, you see, nominally belonged to Mlle. Chocardelle. Maxime burst out laughing at the idea of little Croizeau's finding him a buyer. The firm of Maxime and Chocardelle was losing two thousand francs, it is true, but what was the loss compared with four glorious thousand-franc notes in hand? "Four thousand francs of live coin!—there are moments in one's life when one would sign bills for eight thousand to get them," as the Count said to me.

'Two days later the Count must see the furniture himself, and took the four thousand francs upon him. The sale had been arranged; thanks to little Croizeau's diligence, he pushed matters on; he had "come round" the widow, as he expressed it. It was Maxime's intention to have all the furniture removed at once to a lodging in a new house in the Rue Tronchet, taken in the name of Mme. Ida Bonamy; he did not trouble himself much about the nice old man that was about to lose his thousand francs. But he had sent beforehand for several big furniture vans.

'Once again he was fascinated by the beautiful furniture which a wholesale dealer would have valued at six thousand francs. By the fireside sat the wretched owner, yellow with jaundice, his head tied up in a couple of printed handkerchiefs, and a cotton night-cap on the top of them; he was huddled up in wrappings like a chandelier, exhausted, unable to speak, and altogether so knocked to pieces that the Count was obliged to transact his business with the man-servant. When he had paid down the four thousand francs, and the servant had taken the money to his master for a receipt, Maxime turned to tell the man to call up the vans to the door; but even as he spoke, a voice like a rattle sounded in his ears.

'"It is not worth while, Monsieur le Comte. You and I are quits; I have six hundred and thirty francs fifteen centimes to give you!"

'To his utter consternation, he saw Cérizet, emerged from his wrappings like a butterfly from the chrysalis, holding out the accursed bundle of documents.

'"When I was down on my luck, I learned to act on the stage," added Cérizet. "I am as good as Bouffé at old men."

'"I have fallen among thieves!" shouted Maxime.

'"No, Monsieur le Comte, you are in Mlle. Hortense's house. She is a friend of old Lord Dudley's; he keeps her hidden away here; but she has the bad taste to like your humble servant."

'"If ever I longed to kill a man," so the Count told me afterwards, "it was at that moment; but what could one do? Hortense showed her pretty face, one had to laugh. To keep my dignity, I flung her the six hundred francs. 'There's for the girl,' said I."'

'That is Maxime all over!' cried La Palférine.

'More especially as it was little Croizeau's money,' added Cardot the profound.

'Maxime scored a trumph,' continued Desroches, 'for Hortense exclaimed, "Oh! if I had only known that it was you!"'

'A pretty "confusion" indeed!' put in Malaga. 'You have lost, milord,' she added, turning to the notary.

And in this way the cabinetmaker, to whom Malaga owed a hundred crowns, was paid.

PARIS, 1845.

GAUDISSART II

To Madame la Princesse Cristina de Belgiojoso, née Trivulzio.

To know how to sell, to be able to sell, and to sell. People generally do not suspect how much of the stateliness of Paris is due to these three aspects of the same problem. The brilliant display of shops as rich as the salons of the noblesse before 1789; the splendours of cafés which eclipse, and easily eclipse, the Versailles of our day; the shop-window illusions, new every morning, nightly destroyed; the grace and elegance of the young men that come in contact with fair customers; the piquant faces and costumes of young damsels, who cannot fail to attract the masculine customer; and (and this especially of late) the length, the vast spaces, the Babylonish luxury of galleries where shopkeepers acquire a monopoly of the trade in various articles by bringing them all together,—all this is as nothing. Everything, so far, has been done to appeal to a single sense, and that the most exacting and jaded human faculty, a faculty developed ever since the days of the Roman Empire, until, in our own times, thanks to the efforts of the most fastidious civilisation the world has yet seen, its demands are grown limitless. That faculty resides in the 'eyes of Paris.'

Those eyes require illuminations costing a hundred thousand francs, and many-coloured glass palaces a couple of miles long and sixty feet high; they must have

a fairyland at some fourteen theatres every night, and a succession of panoramas and exhibitions of the triumphs of art; for them a whole world of suffering and pain, and a universe of joy, must revolve through the boulevards or stray through the streets of Paris; for them encyclopædias of carnival frippery and a score of illustrated books are brought out every year, to say nothing of caricatures by the hundred, and vignettes, lithographs, and prints by the thousand. To please those eyes, fifteen thousand francs' worth of gas must blaze every night; and, to conclude, for their delectation the great city yearly spends several millions of francs in opening up views and planting trees. And even yet this is as nothing—it is only the material side of the question; in truth, a mere trifle compared with the expenditure of brain power on the shifts, worthy of Molière, invented by some sixty thousand assistants and forty thousand damsels of the counter, who fasten upon the customer's purse, much as myriads of Seine whitebait fall upon a chance crust floating down the river.

Gaudissart in the mart is at least the equal of his illustrious namesake, now become the typical commercial traveller. Take him away from his shop and his line of business, he is like a collapsed balloon; only among his bales of merchandise do his faculties return, much as an actor is sublime only upon the boards. A French shopman is better educated than his fellows in other European countries; he can at need talk asphalt, Bal Mabille, polkas, literature, illustrated books, railways, politics, parliament, and revolution; transplant him, take away his stage, his yard-stick, his artificial graces; he is foolish beyond belief; but on his own boards, on the tight-rope of the counter, as he displays a shawl with a speech at his tongue's end, and his eye on his customer, he puts the great Talleyrand into the shade; he has more wit than a Désaugiers, more wiles than Cleopatra; he is a match for a Mon-

rose and a Molière to boot. Talleyrand in his own house would have outwitted Gaudissart, but in the shop the parts would have been reversed.

An incident will illustrate the paradox.

Two charming duchesses were chatting with the above-mentioned great diplomatist. The ladies wished for a bracelet; they were waiting for the arrival of a man from a great Parisian jeweller. A Gaudissart accordingly appeared with three bracelets of marvellous workmanship. The great ladies hesitated. Choice is a mental lightning flash; hesitate—there is no more to be said, you are at fault. Inspiration in matters of taste will not come twice. At last, after about ten minutes, the Prince was called in. He saw the two duchesses confronting doubt with its thousand facets, unable to decide between the transcendent merits of two of the trinkets, for the third had been set aside at once. Without leaving his book, without a glance at the bracelets, the Prince looked at the jeweller's assistant.

'Which would you choose for your sweetheart?' asked he.

The young man indicated one of the pair.

'In that case, take the other, you will make two women happy,' said the subtlest of modern diplomatists, 'and make your sweetheart happy too, in my name.'

The two fair ladies smiled, and the young shopman took his departure, delighted with the Prince's present and the implied compliment to his taste.

A woman alights from her splendid carriage before one of the expensive shops where shawls are sold in the Rue Vivienne. She is not alone; women almost always go in pairs on these expeditions; always make the round of half a score of shops before they make up their minds, and laugh together in the intervals over the little comedies played for their benefit. Let us see which of the two acts most in character—the fair customer or the seller, and which has the best of it in such miniature vaudevilles?

If you attempt to describe a sale, the central fact of Parisian trade, you are in duty bound, if you attempt to give the gist of the matter, to produce a type, and for this purpose a shawl or a châtelaine costing some three thousand francs is a more exciting purchase than a length of lawn or dress that costs three hundred. But know, oh foreign visitors from the Old World and the New (if ever this study of the physiology of the Invoice should be by you perused), that this selfsame comedy is played in haberdashers' shops over a barège at two francs or a printed muslin at four francs the yard.

And you, princess, or simple citizen's wife, whichever you may be, how should you distrust that good-looking, very young man, with those frank, innocent eyes, and a cheek like a peach covered with down? He is dressed almost as well as your—cousin, let us say. His tones are as soft as the woollen stuffs which he spreads before you. There are three or four more of his like. One has dark eyes, a decided expression, and an imperial manner of saying, 'This is what you wish'; another, that blue-eyed youth, diffident of manner and meek of speech, prompts the remark, 'Poor boy! he was not born for business'; a third, with light auburn hair, and laughing tawny eyes, has all the lively humour, and activity, and gaiety of the South; while the fourth, he of the tawny red hair and fan-shaped beard, is rough as a communist, with his portentous cravat, his sternness, his dignity, and curt speech.

These varieties of shopmen, corresponding to the principal types of feminine customers, are arms, as it were, directed by the head, a stout personage with a full-blown countenance, a partially bald forehead, and a chest measure befitting a Ministerialist deputy. Occasionally this person wears the ribbon of the Legion of Honour in recognition of the manner in which he supports the dignity of the French draper's wand. From the comfortable curves of his figure you can see

that he has a wife and family, a country house, and an account with the Bank of France. He descends like a *deus ex machinâ*, whenever a tangled problem demands a swift solution. The feminine purchasers are surrounded on all sides with urbanity, youth, pleasant manners, smiles, and jests; the most seeming-simple human products of civilisation are here, all sorted in shades to suit all tastes.

Just one word as to the natural effects of architecture, optical science, and house decoration; one short, decisive, terrible word, of history made on the spot. The work which contains this instructive page is sold at number 76 Rue de Richelieu, where above an elegant shop, all white and gold and crimson velvet, there is an entre-sol into which the light pours straight from the Rue de Ménars, as into a painter's studio—clean, clear, even daylight. What idler in the streets has not beheld the Persian, that Asiatic potentate, ruffling it above the door at the corner of the Rue de la Bourse and the Rue de Richelieu, with a message to deliver *urbi et orbi*, 'Here I reign more tranquilly than at Lahore'? Perhaps but for this immortal analytical study, archæologists might begin to puzzle their heads about him five hundred years hence, and set about writing quartos with plates (like M. Quatremère's work on Olympian Jove) to prove that Napoleon was something of a Sofi in the East before he became 'Emperor of the French.' Well, the wealthy shop laid siege to the poor little entre-sol; and after a bombardment with bank-notes, entered and took possession. The Human Comedy gave way before the comedy of cashmeres. The Persian sacrificed a diamond or two from his crown to buy that so necessary daylight; for a ray of sunlight shows the play of the colours, brings out the charms of a shawl, and doubles its value; 'tis an irresistible light; literally, a golden ray. From this fact you may judge how far Paris shops are arranged with a view to effect.

But to return to the young assistants, to the beribboned man of forty whom the King of the French receives at his table, to the red-bearded head of the department with his autocrat's air. Week by week these emeritus Gaudissarts are brought in contact with whims past counting; they know every vibration of the cashmere chord in the heart of woman. No one, be she lady or lorette, a young mother of a family, a respectable tradesman's wife, a woman of easy virtue, a duchess or a brazen-fronted ballet-dancer, an innocent young girl or a too innocent foreigner, can appear in the shop, but she is watched from the moment when she first lays her fingers upon the door-handle. Her measure is taken at a glance by seven or eight men that stand, in the windows, at the counter, by the door, in a corner, or in the middle of the shop, meditating, to all appearance, on the joys of a bacchanalian Sunday holiday. As you look at them, you ask yourself involuntarily, 'What can they be thinking about?' Well, in the space of one second, a woman's purse, wishes, intentions, and whims are ransacked more thoroughly than a travelling carriage at a frontier in an hour and three-quarters. Nothing is lost on these intelligent rogues. As they stand, solemn as noble fathers on the stage, they take in all the details of a fair customer's dress; an invisible speck of mud on a little shoe, an antiquated hat-brim, soiled or ill-judged bonnet-strings, the fashion of the dress, the age of a pair of gloves. They can tell whether the gown was cut by the intelligent scissors of a Victorine IV.; they know a modish gewgaw or a trinket from Froment-Meurice. Nothing, in short, which can reveal a woman's quality, fortune, or character passes unremarked.

Tremble before them. Never was the Sanhedrim of Gaudissarts, with their chief at their head, known to make a mistake. And, moreover, they communicate their conclusions to one another with telegraphic speed,

in a glance, a smile, the movement of a muscle, a twitch of the lip. If you watch them, you are reminded of the sudden outbreak of light along the Champs Élysées at dusk; one gas-jet does not succeed another more swiftly than an idea flashes from one shopman's eyes to the next.

At once, if the lady is English, the dark, mysterious, portentous Gaudissart advances like a romantic character out of one of Byron's poems.

If she is a city madam, the oldest is put forward. He brings out a hundred shawls in fifteen minutes; he turns her head with colours and patterns; every shawl that he shows her is like a circle described by a kite wheeling round a hapless rabbit, till at the end of half an hour, when her head is swimming and she is utterly incapable of making a decision for herself, the good lady, meeting with a flattering response to all her ideas, refers the question to the assistant, who promptly leaves her on the horns of a dilemma between two equally irresistible shawls.

'This, madame, is very becoming—apple-green, the colour of the season; still, fashions change; while as for this other black-and-white shawl (an opportunity not to be missed), you will never see the end of it, and it will go with any dress.'

This is the A B C of the trade.

'You would not believe how much eloquence is wanted in that beastly line,' the head Gaudissart of this particular establishment remarked quite lately to two acquaintances (Duronceret and Bixiou) who had come trusting in his judgment to buy a shawl. 'Look here; you are artists and discreet, I can tell you about the governor's tricks, and of all the men I ever saw, he is the cleverest. I do not mean as a manufacturer, there M. Fritot is first; but as a salesman. He discovered the 'Selim shawl,' *an absolutely unsaleable* article, yet we never bring it out but we sell it. We keep always a shawl worth five or six hundred francs in a cedar-wood

box, perfectly plain outside, but lined with satin. It is one of the shawls that Selim sent to the Emperor Napoleon. It is our Imperial Guard; it is brought to the front whenever the day is almost lost; *il se vend et ne meurt pas*—it sells its life dearly time after time.'

As he spoke, an Englishwoman stepped from her jobbed carriage and appeared in all the glory of that phlegmatic humour peculiar to Britain and to all its products which make believe they are alive. The apparition put you in mind of the Commandant's statue in *Don Juan*, it walked along, jerkily by fits and starts, in an awkward fashion invented in London, and cultivated in every family with patriotic care.

'An Englishwoman!' he continued for Bixiou's ear. 'An Englishwoman is our Waterloo. There are women who slip through our fingers like eels; we catch them on the staircase. There are lorettes who chaff us, we join in the laugh, we have a hold on them because we give credit. There are sphinx-like foreign ladies; we take a quantity of shawls to their houses, and arrive at an understanding by flattery; but an Englishwoman!—— you might as well attack the bronze statue of Louis Quatorze! That sort of woman turns shopping into an occupation, an amusement. She quizzes us, forsooth!'

The romantic assistant came to the front.

'Does madame wish for real Indian shawls or French, something expensive or——'

'I will see.' (*Je véraie.*)

'How much would madame propose——'

'I will see.'

The shopman went in quest of shawls to spread upon the mantle-stand, giving his colleagues a significant glance. 'What a bore!' he said plainly, with an almost imperceptible shrug of the shoulders.

'These are our best quality in Indian red, blue, and pale orange—all at ten thousand francs. Here

are shawls at five thousand francs, and others at three.'

The Englishwoman took up her eyeglass and looked round the room with gloomy indifference; then she submitted the three stands to the same scrutiny, and made no sign.

'Have you any more?' (*Havaivod'hôte?*) demanded she.

'Yes, madame. But perhaps madame has not quite decided to take a shawl?"

'Oh, quite decided' (*trei-deycidai*).

The young man went in search of cheaper wares. These he spread out solemnly as if they were things of price, saying by his manner, 'Pay attention to all this magnificence!'

'These are much more expensive,' said he. 'They have never been worn; they have come by courier direct from the manufacturers at Lahore.'

'Oh! I see,' said she; 'they are much more like the thing I want.'

The shopman kept his countenance in spite of inward irritation, which communicated itself to Duronceret and Bixiou. The Englishwoman, cool as a cucumber, appeared to rejoice in her phlegmatic humour.

'What price?' she asked, indicating a sky-blue shawl covered with a pattern of birds nestling in pagodas.

'Seven thousand francs.'

She took it up, wrapped it about her shoulders, looked in the glass, and handed it back again.

'No, I do not like it at all.' (*Je n'ame pouinte.*)

A long quarter of an hour went by in trying on other shawls; to no purpose.

'This is all we have, madame,' said the assistant, glancing at the master as he spoke.

'Madame is fastidious, like all persons of taste,' said the head of the establishment, coming forward with that tradesman's suavity in which pomposity is agreeably blended with subservience. The Englishwoman took

up her eyeglass and scanned the manufacturer from head to foot, unwilling to understand that the man before her was eligible for Parliament and dined at the Tuileries.

'I have only one shawl left,' he continued, 'but I never show it. It is not to everybody's taste; it is quite out of the common. I was thinking this morning of giving it to my wife. We have had it in stock since 1805; it belonged to the Empress Josephine.'

'Let me see it, monsieur.'

'Go for it,' said the master, turning to a shopman. 'It is at my house.'

'I should be very much pleased to see it,' said the English lady.

This was a triumph. The splenetic dame was apparently on the point of going. She made as though she saw nothing but the shawls; but all the while she furtively watched the shopmen and the two customers, sheltering her eyes behind the rims of her eyeglasses.

'It cost sixty thousand francs in Turkey, madame.'

'Oh!' (*hâu!*)

'It is one of seven shawls which Selim sent, before his fall, to the Emperor Napoleon. The Empress Josephine, a Creole, as you know, my lady, and very capricious in her tastes, exchanged this one for another brought by the Turkish ambassador, and purchased by my predecessor; but I have never seen the money back. Our ladies in France are not rich enough; it is not as it is in England. The shawl is worth seven thousand francs; and taking interest and compound interest altogether, it makes up fourteen or fifteen thousand by now——'

'How does it make up?' asked the Englishwoman.

'Here it is, madame.'

With precautions, which a custodian of the Dresden *Grüne Gewölbe* might have admired, he took out an infinitesimal key and opened a square cedar-wood box. The Englishwoman was much impressed with its shape and plainness. From that box, lined with black satin,

he drew a shawl worth about fifteen hundred francs, a black pattern on a golden-yellow ground, of which the startling colour was only surpassed by the surprising efforts of the Indian imagination.

'Splendid,' said the lady, in a mixture of French and English, 'it is really handsome. Just my ideal' (*idéol*) 'of a shawl; it is very magnificent.' The rest was lost in a madonna's pose assumed for the purpose of displaying a pair of frigid eyes which she believed to be very fine.

'It was a great favourite with the Emperor Napoleon; he took——'

'A great favourite,' repeated she with her English accent. Then she arranged the shawl about her shoulders and looked at herself in the glass. The proprietor took it to the light, gathered it up in his hands, smoothed it out, showed the gloss on it, played on it as Liszt plays on the pianoforte keys.

'It is very fine; beautiful, sweet!' said the lady, as composedly as possible.

Duronceret, Bixiou, and the shopmen exchanged amused glances. 'The shawl is sold,' they thought.

'Well, madame?' inquired the proprietor, as the Englishwoman appeared to be absorbed in meditations infinitely prolonged.

'Decidedly,' said she; 'I would rather have a carriage' (*une vôteure*).

All the assistants, listening with silent rapt attention, started as one man, as if an electric shock had gone through them.

'I have a very handsome one, madame,' said the proprietor with unshaken composure; 'it belonged to a Russian princess, the Princess Narzicof; she left it with me in payment for goods received. If madame would like to see it, she would be astonished. It is new; it has not been in use altogether for ten days; there is not its like in Paris.'

The shopmen's amazement was suppressed by profound admiration.

'I am quite willing.'

'If madame will keep the shawl,' suggested the proprietor, 'she can try the effect in the carriage.' And he went for his hat and gloves.

'How will this end?' asked the head assistant, as he watched his employer offer an arm to the English lady and go down with her to the jobbed brougham.

By this time the thing had come to be as exciting as the last chapter of a novel for Duronceret and Bixiou, even without the additional interest attached to all contests, however trifling, between England and France.

Twenty minutes later the proprietor returned.

'Go to the Hôtel Lawson (here is the card, "Mrs. Noswell"), and take an invoice that I will give you. There are six thousand francs to take.'

'How did you do it?' asked Duronceret, bowing before the king of invoices.

'Oh, I saw what she was, an eccentric woman that loves to be conspicuous. As soon as she saw that every one stared at her, she said, "Keep your carriage, monsieur, my mind is made up; I will take the shawl." While M. Bigorneau (indicating the romantic-looking assistant) was serving, I watched her carefully; she kept one eye on you all the time to see what you thought of her; she was thinking more about you than of the shawls. Englishwomen are peculiar in their *distaste* (for one cannot call it taste); they do not know what they want; they make up their minds to be guided by circumstances at the time, and not by their own choice. I saw the kind of woman at once, tired of her husband, tired of her brats, regretfully virtuous, craving excitement, always posing as a weeping willow. . . .'

These were his very words.

Which proves that in all other countries of the world a shopkeeper is a shopkeeper; while in France, and in Paris more particularly, he is a student from a Collège

Royal, a well-read man with a taste for art, or angling, or the theatre, and consumed, it may be, with a desire to be M. Cunin-Gridaine's successor, or a colonel of the National Guard, or a member of the General Council of the Seine, or a referee in the Commercial Court.

'M. Adolphe,' said the mistress of the establishment, addressing the slight fair-haired assistant, 'go to the joiner and order another cedar-wood box.'

'And now,' remarked the shopman who had assisted Duronceret and Bixiou to choose a shawl for Mme. Schontz, '*now* we will go through our old stock to find another Selim shawl.'

PARIS, *November* 1844.

THE FIRM OF NUCINGEN

TO MADAME ZULMA CARRAUD

To whom, Madame, but to you should I inscribe this work; to you whose lofty and candid intellect is a treasury to your friends; to you that are to me not only a whole public, but the most indulgent of sisters as well? Will you deign to accept a token of the friendship of which I am proud? You, and some few souls as noble, will grasp the whole of the thought underlying The Firm of Nucingen, *appended to* César Birotteau. *Is there not a whole social lesson in the contrast between the two stories?*

De Balzac.

You know how slight the partitions are between the private rooms of fashionable restaurants in Paris; Véry's largest room, for instance, is cut in two by a removable screen. This Scene is *not* laid at Véry's, but in snug quarters, which for reasons of my own I forbear to specify. We were two, so I will say, like Henri Monnier's Prudhomme, 'I should not like to compromise *her*!'

We had remarked the want of solidity in the wall-structure, so we talked with lowered voices as we sat together in the little private room, lingering over the dainty dishes of a dinner exquisite in more senses than one. We had come as far as the roast, however, and

still we had no neighbours; no sound came from the next room save the crackling of the fire. But when the clock struck eight, we heard voices and noisy footsteps; the waiters brought candles. Evidently there was a party assembled in the next room, and at the first words I knew at once with whom we had to do—four bold cormorants as ever sprang from the foam on the crests of the ever-rising waves of this present generation—four pleasant young fellows whose existence was problematical, since they were not known to possess either stock or landed estates, yet they lived, and lived well. These ingenious *condottieri* of a modern industrialism, that has come to be the most ruthless of all warfares, leave anxieties to their creditors, and keep the pleasures for themselves. They are careful for nothing, save dress. Still, with courage of the Jean Bart order, that will smoke cigars on a barrel of powder (perhaps by way of keeping up their character), with a quizzing humour that outdoes the minor newspapers, sparing no one, not even themselves; clear-sighted, wary, keen after business, grasping yet open-handed, envious yet self-complacent, profound politicians by fits and starts, analysing everything, guessing everything—not one of these in question as yet had contrived to make his way in the world which they chose for their scene of operations. Only one of the four, indeed, had succeeded in coming as far as the foot of the ladder.

To have money is nothing; the self-made man only finds out all that he lacks after six months of flatteries. Andoche Finot, the self-made man in question, stiff, taciturn, cold, and dull-witted, possessed the sort of spirit which will not shrink from grovelling before any creature that may be of use to him, and the cunning to be insolent when he needs a man no longer. Like one of the grotesque figures in the ballet in *Gustave*, he was a marquis behind, a boor in front. And this high-priest of commerce had a following.

Emile Blondet, Journalist, with abundance of intellectual power, reckless, brilliant, and indolent, could do anything that he chose, yet he submitted to be exploited with his eyes open. Treacherous or kind upon impulse, a man to love, but not to respect; quick-witted as a *soubrette*, unable to refuse his pen to any one that asked, or his heart to the first that would borrow it, Emile was the most fascinating of those light-of-loves of whom a fantastic modern wit declared that 'he liked them better in satin slippers than in boots.'

The third in the party, Couture by name, lived by speculation, grafting one affair upon another to make the gains pay for the losses. He was always between wind and water, keeping himself afloat by his bold, sudden strokes and the nervous energy of his play. Hither and thither he would swim over the vast sea of interests in Paris, in quest of some little isle that should be so far a debatable land that he might abide upon it. Clearly Couture was not in his proper place.

As for the fourth and most malicious personage, his name will be enough—it was Bixiou! Not (alas!) the Bixiou of 1825, but the Bixiou of 1836, a misanthropic buffoon, acknowledged supreme, by reason of his energetic and caustic wit; a very fiend let loose now that he saw how he had squandered his intellect in pure waste; a Bixiou vexed by the thought that he had not come by his share of the wreckage in the last Revolution; a Bixiou with a kick for every one, like Pierrot at the Funambules. Bixiou had the whole history of his own times at his finger-ends, more particularly its scandalous chronicle, embellished by added waggeries of his own. He sprang like a clown upon everybody's back, only to do his utmost to leave the executioner's brand upon every pair of shoulders.

The first cravings of gluttony satisfied, our neighbours reached the stage at which we also had arrived, to wit, the dessert; and, as we made no sign, they

believed that they were alone. Thanks to the champagne, the talk grew confidential as they dallied with the dessert amid the cigar smoke. Yet through it all you felt the influence of the icy *esprit* that leaves the most spontaneous feeling frost-bound and stiff, that checks the most generous inspirations, and gives a sharp ring to the laughter. Their table-talk was full of the bitter irony which turns a jest into a sneer; it told of the exhaustion of souls given over to themselves; of lives with no end in view but the satisfaction of self—of egoism induced by these times of peace in which we live. I can think of nothing like it save a pamphlet against mankind at large which Diderot was afraid to publish, a book that bares man's breast simply to expose the plague-sores upon it. We listened to just such a pamphlet as *Rameau's Nephew*, spoken aloud in all good faith, in the course of after-dinner talk in which nothing, not even the point which the speaker wished to carry, was sacred from epigram; nothing taken for granted, nothing built up except upon ruins, nothing reverenced save the sceptic's adopted article of belief—the omnipotence, omniscience, and universal applicability of money.

After some target practice at the outer circle of their acquaintances, they turned their ill-natured shafts at their intimate friends. With a sign I explained my wish to stay and listen as soon as Bixiou took up his parable, as will shortly be seen. And so we listened to one of those terrific improvisations which won that artist such a name among a certain set of seared and jaded spirits; and often interrupted and resumed though it was, memory serves me as a reporter of it. The opinions expressed and the form of expression lie alike outside the conditions of literature. It was, more properly speaking, a medley of sinister revelations that paint our age, to which indeed no other kind of story should be told; and, besides, I throw all the responsibility upon the principal speaker. The pantomime and the gestures that accompanied

Bixiou's changes of voice, as he acted the parts of the various persons, must have been perfect, judging by the applause and admiring comments that broke from his audience of three.

'Then did Rastignac refuse?' asked Blondet, apparently addressing Finot.

'Point blank.'

'But did you threaten him with the newspapers?' asked Bixiou.

'He began to laugh,' returned Finot.

'Rastignac is the late lamented de Marsay's direct heir; he will make his way politically as well as socially,' commented Blondet.

'But how did he make his money?' asked Couture. 'In 1819 both he and the illustrious Bianchon lived in a shabby boarding-house in the Latin Quarter; his people ate roast cockchafers and drank their own wine so as to send him a hundred francs every month. His father's property was not worth a thousand crowns; he had two sisters and a brother on his hands, and now——'

'Now he has an income of forty thousand livres,' continued Finot; 'his sisters had a handsome fortune apiece and married into noble families; he leaves his mother a life interest in the property——'

'Even in 1827 I have known him without a penny,' said Blondet.

'Oh! in 1827,' said Bixiou.

'Well,' resumed Finot, 'yet to-day, as we see, he is in a fair way to be a Minister, a peer of France—anything that he likes. He broke decently with Delphine three years ago; he will not marry except on good grounds; and he may marry a girl of noble family. The chap had the sense to take up with a wealthy woman.'

'My friends, give him the benefit of extenuating circumstances,' urged Blondet. 'When he escaped the clutches of want, he dropped into the claws of a very clever man.'

'You know what Nucingen is,' said Bixiou. 'In the early days, Delphine and Rastignac thought him "good-natured"; he seemed to regard a wife as a plaything, an ornament in his house. And that very fact showed me that the man was square at the base as well as in height,' added Bixiou. 'Nucingen makes no bones about admitting that his wife is his fortune; she is an indispensable chattel, but a wife takes a second place in the high-pressure life of a political leader and great capitalist. He once said in my hearing that Bonaparte had blundered like a bourgeois in his early relations with Josephine; and that after he had had the spirit to use her as a stepping-stone, he had made himself ridiculous by trying to make a companion of her.'

'Any man of unusual powers is bound to take Oriental views of women,' said Blondet.

'The Baron blended the opinions of East and West in a charming Parisian creed. He abhorred de Marsay; de Marsay was unmanageable, but with Rastignac he was much pleased; he exploited him, though Rastignac was not aware of it. All the burdens of married life were put on him. Rastignac bore the brunt of Delphine's whims; he escorted her to the Bois de Boulogne; he went with her to the play; and the little politician and great man of to-day spent a good deal of his life at that time in writing dainty notes. Eugène was scolded for little nothings from the first; he was in good spirits when Delphine was cheerful, and drooped when she felt low; he bore the weight of her confidences and her ailments; he gave up his time, the hours of his precious youth, to fill the empty void of that fair Parisian's idleness. Delphine and he held high councils on the toilettes which went best together; he stood the fire of bad temper and broadsides of pouting fits, while she, by way of trimming the balance, was very nice to the Baron. As for the Baron, he laughed in his sleeve; but whenever he saw that Rastignac was bending under

the strain of the burden, he made "as if he suspected something," and reunited the lovers by a common dread.'

'I can imagine that a wealthy wife would have put Rastignac in the way of a living, and an honourable living, but where did he pick up his fortune?' asked Couture. 'A fortune so considerable as his at the present day must come from somewhere; and nobody ever accused him of inventing a good stroke of business.'

'Somebody left it to him,' said Finot.

'Who?' asked Blondet.

'Some fool that he came across,' suggested Couture.

'He did not steal the whole of it, my little dears,' said Bixiou.

'Let not your terrors rise to fever-heat,
Our age is lenient with those that cheat.

Now, I will tell you about the beginnings of his fortune. In the first place, honour to talent! Our friend is not a "chap," as Finot describes him, but a gentleman in the English sense, who knows the cards and knows the game; whom, moreover, the gallery respects. Rastignac has quite as much intelligence as is needed at a given moment, as if a soldier should make his courage payable at ninety days' sight, with three witnesses and guarantees. He may seem captious, wrong-headed, inconsequent, vacillating, and without any fixed opinions; but let something serious turn up, some combination to scheme out, he will not scatter himself like Blondet here, who chooses these occasions to look at things from his neighbour's point of view. Rastignac concentrates himself, pulls himself together, looks for the point to carry by storm, and goes full tilt for it. He charges like a Murat, breaks squares, pounds away at shareholders, promoters, and the whole shop, and returns, when the breach is made, to his lazy, careless life. Once more he becomes the man of the South, the man of pleasure, the trifling,

idle Rastignac. He has earned the right of lying in bed till noon because a crisis never finds him asleep.'

'So far so good, but just get to his fortune,' said Finot.

'Bixiou will dash that off at a stroke,' replied Blondet. 'Rastignac's fortune was Delphine de Nucingen, a remarkable woman; she combines boldness with foresight.'

'Did she ever lend you money?' inquired Bixiou. Everybody burst out laughing.

'You are mistaken in her,' said Couture, speaking to Blondet; 'her cleverness simply consists in making more or less piquant remarks, in loving Rastignac with tedious fidelity, and obeying him blindly. She is a regular Italian.'

'Money apart,' Andoche Finot put in sourly.

'Oh, come, come,' said Bixiou coaxingly; 'after what we have just been saying, will you venture to blame poor Rastignac for living at the expense of the firm of Nucingen, for being installed in furnished rooms precisely as La Torpille was once installed by our friend des Lupeaulx? You would sink to the vulgarity of the Rue Saint-Denis! First of all, "in the abstract," as Royer-Collard says, the question may abide the *Kritik of Pure Reason*; as for the impure reason——'

'There he goes!' said Finot, turning to Blondet.

'But there is reason in what he says,' exclaimed Blondet. 'The problem is a very old one; it was the grand secret of the famous duel between La Chataigneraie and Jarnac. It was cast up to Jarnac that he was on good terms with his mother-in-law, who, loving him only too well, equipped him sumptuously. When a thing is so true, it ought not to be said. Out of devotion to Henry II., who permitted himself this slander, La. Châtaigneraie took it upon himself, and there followed the duel which enriched the French language with the expression *coup de Jarnac*.'

'Oh! does it go so far back? Then it is noble?' said Finot.

'As proprietor of newspapers and reviews of old standing, you are not bound to know that,' said Blondet.

'There are women,' Bixiou gravely resumed, 'and for that matter, men too, who can cut their lives in two and give away but one-half. (Remark how I word my phrase for you in humanitarian language.) For these, all material interests lie without the range of sentiment. They give their time, their life, their honour to a woman, and hold that between themselves it is not the thing to meddle with bits of tissue paper bearing the legend, "*Forgery is punishable with death.*" And equally they will take nothing from a woman. Yes, the whole thing is debased if fusion of interests follows on fusion of souls. This is a doctrine much preached, and very seldom practised.'

'Oh, what rubbish!' cried Blondet. 'The Maréchal de Richelieu understood something of gallantry, and he settled an allowance of a thousand louis d'or on Mme. de la Popelinière after that affair of the hiding-place behind the hearth. Agnes Sorel, in all simplicity, took her fortune to Charles VII., and the King accepted it. Jacques Cœur kept the crown for France; he was allowed to do it, and, womanlike, France was ungrateful.'

'Gentlemen,' said Bixiou, 'a love that does not imply an indissoluble friendship, to my thinking, is momentary libertinage. What sort of entire surrender is it that keeps something back? Between these two diametrically opposed doctrines, the one as profoundly immoral as the other, there is no possible compromise. It seems to me that any shrinking from a complete union is surely due to a belief that the union cannot last, and if so, farewell to illusion. The passion that does not believe that it will last for ever is a hideous thing. (Here is pure unadulterated Fénelon for you!) At the same time,

those who know the world, the observer, the man of the world, the wearers of irreproachable gloves and ties, the men who do not blush to marry a woman for her money, proclaim the necessity of a complete separation of sentiment and interest. The other sort are lunatics that love and imagine that they and the woman they love are the only two beings in the world; for them millions are dirt; the glove or the camellia flower that She wore is worth millions. If the squandered filthy lucre is never to be found again in their possession, you find the remains of floral relics hoarded in dainty cedar-wood boxes. They cannot distinguish themselves one from the other; for them there is no "I" left. *Thou*—that is their Word made flesh. What can you do? Can you stop the course of this "hidden disease of the heart"? There are fools that love without calculation, and wise men that calculate while they love.'

'To my thinking Bixiou is sublime,' cried Blondet. 'What does Finot say to it?'

'Anywhere else,' said Finot, drawing himself up in his cravat, 'anywhere else, I should say, with the "gentlemen"; but here, I think——'

'With the scoundrelly scapegraces with whom you have the honour to associate?' said Bixiou.

'Upon my word, yes.'

'And you?' asked Bixiou, turning to Couture.

'Stuff and nonsense!' cried Couture. 'The woman that will not make a stepping-stone of her body, that the man she singles out may reach his goal, is a woman that has no heart except for her own purposes.'

'And you, Blondet?'

'I do not preach, I practise.'

'Very good,' rejoined Bixiou in his most ironical tones. 'Rastignac was not of your way of thinking. To take without repaying is detestable, and even rather bad form; but to take that you may render a hundredfold, like the Lord, is a chivalrous deed. This was Rastignac's view.

He felt profoundly humiliated by his community of interests with Delphine de Nucingen; I can tell you that he regretted it; I have seen him deploring his position with tears in his eyes. Yes, he shed tears, he did indeed—after supper. Well, now to *our* way of thinking——'

'I say, you are laughing at us,' said Finot.

'Not the least in the world. We were talking of Rastignac. From your point of view his affliction would be a sign of his corruption; for by that time he was not nearly so much in love with Delphine. What would you have? he felt the prick in his heart, poor fellow. But he was a man of noble descent and profound depravity, whereas we are virtuous artists. So Rastignac meant to enrich Delphine; he was a poor man, she a rich woman. Would you believe it?—he succeeded. Rastignac, who might have fought at need, like Jarnac, went over to the opinion of Henri II. on the strength of his great maxim, "There is no such thing as absolute right; there are only circumstances." This brings us to the history of his fortune.'

'You might just as well make a start with your story instead of drawing us on to traduce ourselves,' said Blondet with urbane good-humour.

'Aha! my boy,' returned Bixiou, administering a little tap to the back of Blondet's head, 'you are making up for lost time over the champagne!'

'Oh! by the sacred name of shareholder, get on with your story!' cried Couture.

'I was within an ace of it,' retorted Bixiou, 'but you with your profanity have brought me to the climax.'

'Then, are there shareholders in the tale?' inquired Finot.

'Yes; rich as rich can be—like yours.'

'It seems to me,' Finot began stiffly, 'that some consideration is owing to a good fellow to whom you look for a bill for five hundred francs upon occasion——'

'Waiter!' called Bixiou.

'What do you want with the waiter?' asked Blondet.

'I want five hundred francs to repay Finot, so that I can tear up my I.O.U. and set my tongue free.'

'Get on with your story,' said Finot, making believe to laugh.

'I take you all to witness that I am not the property of this insolent fellow, who fancies that my silence is worth no more than five hundred francs. You will never be a minister if you cannot gauge people's consciences. There, my good Finot,' he added soothingly, 'I will get on with my story without personalities, and we shall be quits.'

'Now,' said Couture with a smile, 'he will begin to prove for our benefit that Nucingen made Rastignac's fortune.'

'You are not so far out as you think,' returned Bixiou. 'You do not know what Nucingen is, financially speaking.'

'Do you know so much as a word as to his beginnings?' asked Blondet.

'I have only known him in his own house,' said Bixiou, 'but we may have seen each other in the street in the old days.'

'The prosperity of the firm of Nucingen is one of the most extraordinary things seen in our days,' began Blondet. 'In 1804 Nucingen's name was scarcely known. At that time bankers would have shuddered at the idea of three hundred thousand francs' worth of his acceptances in the market. The great capitalist felt his inferiority. How was he to get known? He suspended payment. Good! Every market rang with a name hitherto only known in Strasbourg and the Quartier Poissonnière. He issued deposit certificates to his creditors, and resumed payment; forthwith people grew accustomed to his paper all over France. Then an

unheard-of thing happened—his paper revived, was in demand, and rose in value. Nucingen's paper was much inquired for. The year 1815 arrives, my banker calls in his capital, buys up Government stock before the battle of Waterloo, suspends payment again in the thick of the crisis, and meets his engagements with shares in the Wortschin mines, which he himself issued at twenty per cent. more than he gave for them! Yes, gentlemen!—He took a hundred and fifty thousand bottles of champagne of Grandet to cover himself (foreseeing the failure of the virtuous parent of the present Comte d'Aubrion), and as much Bordeaux wine of Duberghe at the same time. Those three hundred thousand bottles which he took over (and took over at thirty sous a-piece, my dear boy) he supplied at the price of six francs per bottle to the Allies in the Palais Royal during the foreign occupation, between 1817 and 1819. Nucingen's name and his paper acquired a European celebrity. The illustrious Baron, so far from being engulfed like others, rose the higher for calamities. Twice his arrangements had paid holders of his paper uncommonly well; *he* try to swindle them? Impossible. He is supposed to be as honest a man as you will find. When he suspends payment a third time, his paper will circulate in Asia, Mexico, and Australia, among the aborigines. No one but Ouvrard saw through this Alsacien banker, the son of some Jew or other converted by ambition; Ouvrard said, "When Nucingen lets gold go, you may be sure that it is to catch diamonds."'

'His crony, du Tillet, is just such another,' said Finot. 'And, mind you, that of birth du Tillet has just precisely so much as is necessary to exist; the chap had not a farthing in 1814, and you see what he is now; and he has done something that none of us has managed to do (I am not speaking of you, Couture), he has had friends instead of enemies. In fact, he has kept his past life so quiet, that unless you rake the sewers you

are not likely to find out that he was an assistant in a perfumer's shop in the Rue Saint Honoré, no further back than 1814.'

'Tut, tut, tut!' said Bixiou, 'do not think of comparing Nucingen with a little dabbler like du Tillet, a jackal that gets on in life through his sense of smell. He scents a carcase by instinct, and comes in time to get the best bone. Besides, just look at the two men. The one has a sharp-pointed face like a cat, he is thin and lanky; the other is cubical, fat, heavy as a sack, imperturbable as a diplomatist. Nucingen has a thick, heavy hand, and lynx eyes that never light up; his depths are not in front, but behind; he is inscrutable, you never see what he is making for. Whereas du Tillet's cunning, as Napoleon said of somebody (I have forgotten the name), is like cotton spun too fine, it breaks.'

'I do not myself see that Nucingen has any advantage over du Tillet,' said Blondet, 'unless it is that he has the sense to see that a capitalist ought not to rise higher than a baron's rank, while du Tillet has a mind to be an Italian count.'

'Blondet—one word, my boy,' put in Couture. 'In the first place, Nucingen dared to say that honesty is simply a question of appearances; and secondly, to know him well you must be in business yourself. With him banking is but a single department, and a very small one; he holds Government contracts for wines, wools, indigoes—anything, in short, on which any profit can be made. He has an all-round genius. The elephant of finance would contract to deliver votes on a division, or the Greeks to the Turks. For him business means the sum-total of varieties; as Cousin would say, the unity of specialities. Looked at in this way, banking becomes a kind of statecraft in itself, requiring a powerful head; and a man thoroughly tempered is drawn on to set himself above the laws of a morality that cramps him.'

'Right, my son,' said Blondet; 'but we, and we alone,

can comprehend that this means bringing war into the financial world. A banker is a conquering general making sacrifices on a tremendous scale to gain ends that no one perceives; his soldiers are private people's interests. He has stratagems to plan out, partisans to bring into the field, ambushes to set, towns to take. Most men of this stamp are so close upon the borders of politics, that in the end they are drawn into public life, and thereby lose their fortunes. The firm of Necker, for instance, was ruined in this way; the famous Samuel Bernard was all but ruined. Some great capitalist in every age makes a colossal fortune, and leaves behind him neither fortune nor a family; there was the firm of Pâris Brothers, for instance, that helped to pull down Law; there was Law himself (beside whom other promoters of companies are but pigmies); there was Bouret and Beaujon—none of them left any representative. Finance, like Time, devours its own children. If the banker is to perpetuate himself, he must found a noble house, a dynasty; like the Fuggers of Antwerp, that lent money to Charles v. and were created Princes of Babenhausen, a family that exists at this day—in the *Almanach de Gotha*. The instinct of self-preservation, working it may be unconsciously, leads the banker to seek a title. Jacques Cœur was the founder of the great noble house of Noirmoutier, extinct in the reign of Louis xiii. What power that man had! He was ruined for making a legitimate king; and he died, prince of an island in the Archipelago, where he built a magnificent cathedral.'

'Oh! you are giving us a historical lecture, we are wandering away from the present; the crown has no right of conferring nobility, and barons and counts are made with closed doors; more is the pity!' said Finot.

'You regret the times of the *savonnette à vilain*, when you could buy an office that ennobled?' asked Bixiou. 'You are right. *Je reviens à nos moutons.*—Do you

know Beaudenord? No? no? no? Ah, well! See how all things pass away! Poor fellow, ten years ago he was the flower of dandyism; and now, so thoroughly absorbed that you no more know him than Finot just now knew the origin of the expression "*coup de Jarnac*"—I repeat that simply for the sake of illustration, and not to tease you, Finot. Well, it is a fact, he belonged to the Faubourg Saint-Germain.

'Beaudenord is the first pigeon that I will bring on the scene. And, in the first place, his name was Godefroid de Beaudenord; neither Finot, nor Blondet, nor Couture, nor I are likely to undervalue such an advantage as that! After a ball, when a score of pretty women stand behooded waiting for their carriages, with their husbands and adorers at their sides, Beaudenord could hear his people called without a pang of mortification. In the second place, he rejoiced in the full complement of limbs; he was whole and sound, had no mote in his eyes, no false hair, no artificial calves; he was neither knock-kneed nor bandy-legged, his dorsal column was straight, his waist slender, his hands white and shapely. His hair was black; he was of a complexion neither too pink, like a grocer's assistant, nor yet too brown, like a Calabrese. Finally, and this is an essential point, Beaudenord was not too handsome, like some of our friends that look rather too much of professional beauties to be anything else; but no more of that; we have said it, it is shocking! Well, he was a crack shot, and sat a horse to admiration; he had fought a duel for a trifle, and had not killed his man.

'If you wish to know in what pure, complete, and unadulterated happiness consists in this Nineteenth Century in Paris—the happiness, that is to say, of a young man of twenty-six—do you realise that you must enter into the infinitely small details of existence? Beaudenord's bootmaker had precisely hit off his style of foot; he was

well shod; his tailor loved to clothe him. Godefroid neither rolled his r's, nor lapsed into Normanisms nor Gascon; he spoke pure and correct French, and tied his cravat correctly (like Finot). He had neither father nor mother—such luck had he!—and his guardian was the Marquis d'Aiglemont, his cousin by marriage. He could go among city people as he chose, and the Faubourg Saint-Germain could make no objection; for, fortunately, a young bachelor is allowed to make his own pleasure his sole rule of life, he is at liberty to betake himself wherever amusement is to be found, and to shun the gloomy places where cares flourish and multiply. Finally, he had been vaccinated (you know what I mean, Blondet).

'And yet, in spite of all these virtues,' continued Bixiou, 'he might very well have been a very unhappy young man. Eh! eh! that word happiness, unhappily, seems to us to mean something absolute, a delusion which sets so many wiseacres inquiring what happiness is. A very clever woman said that "Happiness was where you chose to put it."'

'She formulated a dismal truth,' said Blondet.

'And a moral,' added Finot.

'Double distilled,' said Blondet. 'Happiness, like Good, like Evil, is relative. Wherefore La Fontaine used to hope that in course of time the damned would feel as much at home in hell as a fish in water.'

'La Fontaine's sayings are known in Philistia!' put in Bixiou.

'Happiness at six-and-twenty in Paris is not the happiness of six-and-twenty at—say Blois,' continued Blondet, taking no notice of the interruption. 'And those that proceed from this text to rail at the instability of opinion are either knaves or fools for their pains. Modern medicine, which passed (it is its fairest title to glory) from a hypothetical to a positive science, through the influence of the great analytical school of

Paris, has proved beyond a doubt that a man is periodically renewed throughout——'

'New haft, new blade, like Jeannot's knife, and yet you think that he is still the same man,' broke in Bixiou. 'So there are several lozenges in the harlequin's coat that we call happiness; and—well, there was neither hole nor stain in this Godefroid's costume. A young man of six-and-twenty, who would be happy in love, who would be loved, that is to say, not for his blossoming youth, nor for his wit, nor for his figure, but spontaneously, and not even merely in return for his own love; a young man, I say, who has found love in the abstract, to quote Royer-Collard, might yet very possibly find never a farthing in the purse which She, loving and beloved, embroidered for him; he might owe rent to his landlord; he might be unable to pay the bootmaker before mentioned; his very tailor, like France herself, might at last show signs of disaffection. In short, he might have love and yet be poor. And poverty spoils a young man's happiness, unless he holds our transcendental views of the fusion of interests. I know nothing more wearing than happiness within combined with adversity without. It is as if you had one leg freezing in the draught from the door, and the other half-roasted by a brazier—as I have at this moment. I hope to be understood. Comes there an echo from thy waistcoat-pocket, Blondet? Between ourselves, let the heart alone, it spoils the intellect.

'Let us resume. Godefroid de Beaudenord was respected by his tradespeople, for they were paid with tolerable regularity. The witty woman before quoted —I cannot give her name, for she is still living, thanks to her want of heart——'

'Who is this?'

'The Marquise d'Espard. She said that a young man ought to live on an entre-sol; there should be no sign of domesticity about the place; no cook, no kitchen,

an old man-servant to wait upon him, and no pretence of a permanence. In her opinion, any other sort of establishment is bad form. Godefroid de Beaudenord, faithful to this programme, lodged on an entre-sol on the Quai Malaquais; he had, however, been obliged to have this much in common with married couples, he had put a bedstead in his room, though for that matter it was so narrow that he seldom slept in it. An English-woman might have visited his rooms and found nothing "improper" there. Finot, you have yet to learn the great law of the "Improper" that rules Britain. But, for the sake of the bond between us—that bill for a thousand francs—I will just give you some idea of it. I have been in England myself.—I will give him wit enough for a couple of thousand,' he added in an aside to Blondet.

'In England, Finot, you grow extremely intimate with a woman in the course of an evening, at a ball or wherever it is; next day you meet her in the street and look as though you knew her again—"improper."—At dinner you discover a delightful man beneath your left-hand neighbour's dress-coat; a clever man; no high mightiness, no constraint, nothing of an Englishman about him. In accordance with the tradition of French breeding, so urbane, so gracious as they are, you address your neighbour—"improper."—At a ball you walk up to a pretty woman to ask her to dance—"improper." You wax enthusiastic, you argue, laugh, and give yourself out, you fling yourself heart and soul into the conversation, you give expression to your real feelings, you play when you are at the card-table, chat while you chat, eat while you eat—"improper! improper! improper!" Stendhal, one of the cleverest and profoundest minds of the age, hit off the "improper" excellently well when he said that such-and-such a British peer did not dare to cross his legs when he sat alone before his own hearth for fear of being improper. An English gentlewoman,

were she one of the rabid "Saints"—that most straitest sect of Protestants that would leave their whole family to starve if the said family did anything "improper"—may play the deuce's own delight in her bedroom, and need not be "improper," but she would look on herself as lost if she received a visit from a man of her acquaintance in the aforesaid room. Thanks to propriety, London and its inhabitants will be found petrified some of these days.'

'And to think that there are asses here in France that want to import the solemn tomfoolery that the English keep up among themselves with that admirable self-possession which you know!' added Blondet. 'It is enough to make any man shudder if he has seen the English at home, and recollects the charming, gracious French manners. Sir Walter Scott was afraid to paint women as they are for fear of being "improper"; and at the close of his life repented of the creation of the great character of Effie in *The Heart of Midlothian*.'

'Do you wish not to be "improper" in England?' asked Bixiou, addressing Finot.

'Well?'

'Go to the Tuileries and look at a figure there, something like a fireman carved in marble ("Themistocles," the statuary calls it), try to walk like the Commandant's statue, and you will never be "improper." It was through strict observance of the great law of the *Im*proper that Godefroid's happiness became complete. Here is the story:—

'Beaudenord had a tiger, not a "groom," as they write that know nothing of society. The tiger, a diminutive Irish page, called Paddy, Toby, Joby (which you please), was three feet in height by twenty inches in breadth, a weasel-faced infant, with nerves of steel tempered in fire-water, and agile as a squirrel. He drove a landau with a skill never yet at fault in London

or Paris. He had a lizard's eye, as sharp as my own, and he could mount a horse like the elder Franconi. With the rosy cheeks and yellow hair of one of Rubens's Madonnas, he was double-faced as a prince, and as knowing as an old attorney ; in short, at the age of ten he was nothing more nor less than a blossom of depravity, gambling and swearing, partial to jam and punch, pert as a *feuilleton*, impudent and light-fingered as any Paris street-arab. He had been a source of honour and profit to a well-known English lord, for whom he had already won seven hundred thousand francs on the racecourse. The aforesaid nobleman set no small store on Toby. His tiger was a curiosity, the very smallest tiger in town. Perched aloft on the back of a thoroughbred, Joby looked like a hawk. Yet—the great man dismissed him. Not for greediness, not for dishonesty, nor murder, nor for criminal conversation, nor for bad manners, nor rudeness to my lady, nor for cutting holes in my lady's own woman's pockets, nor because he had been "got at" by some of his master's rivals on the turf, nor for playing games of a Sunday, nor for bad behaviour of any sort or description. Toby might have done all these things, he might even have spoken to milord before milord spoke to him, and his noble master might, perhaps, have pardoned that breach of the law domestic. Milord would have put up with a good deal from Toby ; he was very fond of him. Toby could drive a tandem dog-cart, riding on the wheeler, postillion fashion ; his legs did not reach the shafts, he looked in fact very much like one of the cherub heads circling about the Eternal Father in old Italian pictures. But an English journalist wrote a delicious description of the little angel, in the course of which he said that Paddy was quite too pretty for a tiger; in fact, he offered to bet that Paddy was a tame tigress. The description, on the heads of it, was calculated to poison minds and end in something "improper." And the superlative of

"improper" is the way to the gallows. Milord's circumspection was highly approved by my lady.

'But poor Toby, now that his precise position in insular zoology had been called in question, found himself hopelessly out of place. At that time Godefroid had blossomed out at the French Embassy in London, where he learned the adventures of Toby, Joby, Paddy. Godefroid found the infant weeping over a pot of jam (he had already lost the guineas with which milord gilded his misfortune). Godefroid took possession of him; and so it fell out that on his return among us he brought back with him the sweetest thing in tigers from England. He was known by his tiger—as Couture is known by his waistcoats—and found no difficulty in entering the fraternity of the club yclept to-day the Grammont. He had renounced the diplomatic career; he ceased accordingly to alarm the susceptibilities of the ambitious; and as he had no very dangerous amount of intellect, he was well looked upon everywhere.

Some of us would feel mortified if we saw only smiling faces wherever we went; we enjoy the sour contortions of envy. Godefroid did not like to be disliked. Every one has his taste. Now for the solid, practical aspects of life!

The distinguishing feature of his chambers, where I have licked my lips over breakfast more than once, was a mysterious dressing-closet, nicely decorated, and comfortably appointed, with a grate in it and a bath-tub. It gave upon a narrow staircase, the folding doors were noiseless, the locks well oiled, the hinges discreet, the window panes of frosted glass, the curtain impervious to light. While the bedroom was, as it ought to have been, in a fine disorder which would suit the most exacting painter in water-colours; while everything therein was redolent of the Bohemian life of a young man of fashion, the dressing-closet was like a shrine—white, spotless, neat, and warm. There were no

draughts from door or window, the carpet had been made soft for bare feet hastily put to the floor in a sudden panic of alarm—which stamps him as your thoroughbred dandy that knows life ; for here, in a few moments, he may show himself either a noodle or a master in those little details in which a man's character is revealed. The Marquise previously quoted—no, it was the Marquise de Rochefide—came out of that dressing-closet in a furious rage, and never went back again. She discovered nothing "improper" in it. Godefroid used to keep a little cupboard full of——'

'Waistcoats ?' suggested Finot.

'Come, now, just like you, great Turcaret that you are. (I shall never form that fellow.) Why, no. Full of cakes, and fruit, and dainty little flasks of Malaga and Lunel ; an *en cas de nuit* in Louis Quatorze's style ; anything that can tickle the delicate and well-bred appetite of sixteen quarterings. A knowing old man-servant, very strong in matters veterinary, waited on the horses and groomed Godefroid. He had been with the late M. de Beaudenord, Godefroid's father, and bore Godefroid an inveterate affection, a kind of heart complaint which has almost disappeared among domestic servants since savings banks were established.

'All material wellbeing is based upon arithmetic. You, to whom Paris is known down to its very excrescences, will see that Beaudenord must have required about seventeen thousand livres per annum ; for he paid some seventeen francs of taxes and spent a thousand crowns on his own whims. Well, dear boys, when Godefroid came of age, the Marquis d'Aiglemont submitted to him such an account of his trust as none of us would be likely to give a nephew ; Godefroid's name was inscribed as the owner of eighteen thousand livres of *rentes*, a remnant of his father's wealth spared by the harrow of the great reduction under the Republic and the hailstorms of Imperial arrears. D'Aiglemont, that upright guardian,

also put his ward in possession of some thirty thousand francs of savings invested with the firm of Nucingen; saying with all the charm of a *grand seigneur* and the indulgence of a soldier of the Empire, that he had contrived to put it aside for his ward's young man's follies. "If you will take my advice, Godefroid," added he, "instead of squandering the money like a fool, as so many young men do, let it go in follies that will be useful to you afterwards. Take an attaché's post at Turin, and then go to Naples, and from Naples to London, and you will be amused and learn something for your money. Afterwards, if you think of a career, the time and the money will not have been thrown away." The late lamented d'Aiglemont had more sense than people credited him with, which is more than can be said of some of us.'

'A young fellow that starts with an assured income of eighteen thousand livres at one-and-twenty is lost,' said Couture.'

'Unless he is miserly, or very much above the ordinary level,' added Blondet.

'Well, Godefroid sojourned in the four capitals of Italy,' continued Bixiou. 'He lived in England and Germany, he spent some little time at St. Petersburg, he ran over Holland; but he parted company with the aforesaid thirty thousand francs by living as if he had thirty thousand a year. Everywhere he found the same *suprême de volaille*, the same aspics, and French wines; he heard French spoken wherever he went—in short, he never got away from Paris. He ought, of course, to have tried to deprave his disposition, to fence himself in triple brass, to get rid of his illusions, to learn to hear anything said without a blush, and to master the inmost secrets of the Powers.—Pooh! with a good deal of trouble he equipped himself with four languages—that is to say, he laid in a stock of four words for one idea. Then he came back, and certain tedious dowagers,

styled "conquests" abroad, were left disconsolate. Godefroid came back, shy, scarcely formed, a good fellow with a confiding disposition, incapable of saying ill of any one who honoured him with an admittance to his house, too staunch to be a diplomatist, altogether he was what we call a thoroughly good fellow.'

'To cut it short, a brat with eighteen thousand livres per annum to drop over the first investment that turns up,' said Couture.

'That confounded Couture has such a habit of anticipating dividends, that he is anticipating the end of my tale. Where was I? Oh! Beaudenord came back. When he took up his abode on the Quai Malaquais, it came to pass that a thousand francs over and above his needs was altogether insufficient to keep up his share of a box at the Italiens and the Opéra properly. When he lost twenty-five or thirty louis at play at one swoop, naturally he paid; when he won, he spent the money; so should we if we were fools enough to be drawn into a bet. Beaudenord, feeling pinched with his eighteen thousand francs, saw the necessity of creating what we to-day call a balance in hand. It was a great notion of his "not to get too deep." He took counsel of his sometime guardian. "The funds are now at par, my dear boy," quoth d'Aiglemont; "sell out. I have sold out mine and my wife's. Nucingen has all my capital, and is giving me six per cent.; do likewise, you will have one per cent. the more upon your capital, and with that you will be quite comfortable."

'In three days' time our Godefroid was comfortable. His increase of income exactly supplied his superfluities; his material happiness was complete.

'Suppose that it were possible to read the minds of all the young men in Paris at one glance (as, it appears, will be done at the Day of Judgment with all the millions upon millions that have grovelled in all spheres, and worn all uniforms or the uniform of nature), and to ask

them whether happiness at six-and-twenty is or is not made up of the following items—to wit, to own a saddle-horse and a tilbury, or a cab, with a fresh, rosy-faced Toby Joby Paddy no bigger than your fist, and to hire an unimpeachable brougham for twelve francs an evening; to appear elegantly arrayed, agreeably to the laws that regulate a man's clothes, at eight o'clock, noon, four o'clock in the afternoon, and in the evening; to be well received at every embassy, and to cull the short-lived flowers of superficial, cosmopolitan friendships; to be not insufferably handsome, to carry your head, your coat, and your name well; to inhabit a charming little entre-sol after the pattern of the rooms just described on the Quai Malaquais; to be able to ask a party of friends to dine at the *Rocher de Cancale* without a previous consultation with your trousers' pocket; never to be pulled up in any rational project by the words, "And the money?" and finally, to be able to renew at pleasure the pink rosettes that adorn the ears of three thoroughbreds and the lining of your hat?

'To such inquiry any ordinary young man (and we ourselves that are not ordinary men) would reply that the happiness is incomplete; that it is like the Madeleine without the altar; that a man must love and be loved, or love without return, or be loved without loving, or love at cross purposes. Now for happiness as a mental condition.

'In January 1823, after Godefroid de Beaudenord had set foot in the various social circles which it pleased him to enter, and knew his way about in them, and felt himself secure amid these joys, he saw the necessity of a sunshade—the advantage of having a great lady to complain of, instead of chewing the stems of roses bought for fivepence apiece of Mme. Prévost, after the manner of the callow youngsters that chirp and cackle in the lobbies of the Opéra, like chickens in a coop. In short, he resolved to centre his ideas, his

sentiments, his affections upon a woman, *one woman*?—LA PHAMME! Ah! . . .

'At first he conceived the preposterous notion of an unhappy passion, and gyrated for a while about his fair cousin, Mme. d'Aiglemont, not perceiving that she had already danced the waltz in *Faust* with a diplomatist. The year '25 went by, spent in tentatives, in futile flirtations, and an unsuccessful quest. The loving object of which he was in search did not appear. Passion is extremely rare; and in our time as many barriers have been raised against passion in social life as barricades in the streets. In truth, my brothers, the "improper" is gaining upon us, I tell you!

'As we may incur reproach for following on the heels of portrait painters, auctioneers, and fashionable dress-makers, I will not inflict any description upon you of *her* in whom Godefroid recognised the female of his species. Age, nineteen; height, four feet eleven inches; fair hair, eyebrows *idem*, blue eyes, forehead neither high nor low, curved nose, little mouth, short turned-up chin, oval face; distinguishing signs—none. Such was the description on the passport of the beloved object. You will not ask more than the police, or their worships the mayors, of all the towns and communes of France, the gendarmes and the rest of the powers that be? In other respects—I give you my word for it—she was a rough sketch of a Venus dei Medici.

'The first time that Godefroid went to one of the balls for which Mme. de Nucingen enjoyed a certain not undeserved reputation, he caught a glimpse of his future lady-love in a quadrille, and was set marvelling by that height of four feet eleven inches. The fair hair rippled in a shower of curls about the little girlish head, she looked as fresh as a naïad peeping out through the crystal pane of her stream to take a look at the spring flowers. (This is quite in the modern style, strings of phrases as endless as the macaroni on the table a while

ago.) On that "eyebrows *idem*" (no offence to the prefect of police) Parny, that writer of light and playful verse, would have hung half-a-dozen couplets, comparing them very agreeably to Cupid's bow, at the same time bidding us observe that the dart was beneath ; the said dart, however, was neither very potent nor very penetrating, for as yet it was controlled by the namby-pamby sweetness of a Mlle. de la Vallière as depicted on fire-screens, at the moment when she solemnises her betrothal in the sight of heaven, any solemnisation before the registrar being quite out of the question.

'You know the effect of fair hair and blue eyes in the soft, voluptuous decorous dance? Such a girl does not knock audaciously at your heart, like the dark-haired damsels that seem to say after the fashion of Spanish beggars, "Your money or your life; give me five francs or take my contempt!" These insolent and somewhat dangerous beauties may find favour in the sight of many men, but to my thinking the blonde that has the good fortune to look extremely tender and yielding, while forgoing none of her rights to scold, to tease, to use unmeasured language, to be jealous without grounds, to do anything, in short, that makes woman adorable,—the fair-haired girl, I say, will always be more sure to marry than the ardent brunette. Firewood is dear, you see.

'Isaure, white as an Alsacienne (she first saw the light at Strasbourg, and spoke German with a slight and very agreeable French accent), danced to admiration. Her feet, omitted on the passport, though they really might have found a place there under the heading Distinguishing Signs, were remarkable for their small size, and for that particular something which old-fashioned dancing masters used to call *flic-flac*, a something that put you in mind of Mlle. Mars's agreeable delivery, for all the Muses are sisters, and dancer and poet alike have their feet upon the earth. Isaure's feet spoke

lightly and swiftly with a clearness and precision which augured well for the things of the heart. "*Elle a du flic-flac*," was old Marcel's highest word of praise, and old Marcel was the dancing master that deserved the epithet of "the Great." People used to say "the Great Marcel," as they said "Frederick the Great," and in Frederick's time.

'Did Marcel compose any ballets?' inquired Finot.

'Yes, something in the style of *Les Quatre Éléments* and *L'Europe galante*.'

'What times they were, when great nobles dressed the dancers!' said Finot.

'Improper!' said Bixiou. 'Isaure did not raise herself on the tips of her toes, she stayed on the ground, she swayed in the dance without jerks, and neither more nor less voluptuously than a young lady ought to do. There was a profound philosophy in Marcel's remark that every age and condition had its dance; a married woman should not dance like a young girl, nor a little jackanapes like a capitalist, nor a soldier like a page; he even went so far as to say that the infantry ought not to dance like the cavalry, and from this point he proceeded to classify the world at large. All these fine distinctions seem very far away.'

'Ah!' said Blondet, 'you have set your finger on a great calamity. If Marcel had been properly understood, there would have been no French Revolution.'

'It had been Godefroid's privilege to run over Europe,' resumed Bixiou, 'nor had he neglected his opportunities of making a thorough comparative study of European dancing. Perhaps but for profound diligence in the pursuit of what is usually held to be useless knowledge, he would never have fallen in love with this young lady; as it was, out of the three hundred guests that crowded the handsome rooms in the Rue Saint-Lazare, he alone comprehended the unpublished romance revealed by a garrulous quadrille. People certainly noticed Isaure

d'Aldrigger's dancing; but in this present century the cry is, "Skim lightly over the surface, do not lean your weight on it"; so one said (he was a notary's clerk). "There is a girl that dances uncommonly well"; another (a lady in a turban), "There is a young lady that dances enchantingly;" and a third (a woman of thirty), "That little thing is not dancing badly."—But to return to the great Marcel, let us parody his best known saying with, "How much there is in an *avant-deux*."'

'And let us get on a little faster,' said Blondet; 'you are maundering.'

'Isaure,' continued Bixiou, looking askance at Blondet, 'wore a simple white crêpe dress with green ribbons; she had a camellia in her hair, a camellia at her waist, another camellia at her skirt-hem, and a camellia——'

'Come, now! here come Sancho's three hundred goats.'

'Therein lies all literature, dear boy. *Clarissa* is a masterpiece, there are fourteen volumes of her, and the most wooden-headed playwright would give you the whole of *Clarissa* in a single act. So long as I amuse you, what have you to complain of? That costume was positively lovely. Don't you like camellias? Would you rather have dahlias? No? Very good, chestnuts then, here's for you.' (And probably Bixiou flung a chestnut across the table, for we heard something drop on a plate.)

'I was wrong, I acknowledge it. Go on,' said Blondet.

'I resume. "Pretty enough to marry, isn't she?" said Rastignac, coming up to Godefroid de Beaudenord, and indicating the little one with the spotless white camellias, every petal intact.

'Rastignac being an intimate friend, Godefroid answered in a low voice, "Well, so I was thinking. I was saying to myself that instead of enjoying my happiness with fear and trembling at every moment; instead of taking a world of trouble to whisper a word in an inattentive ear, of looking over the house at the Italiens to see if some one

wears a red flower or a white in her hair, or watching along the Corso for a gloved hand on a carriage door, as we used to do at Milan; instead of snatching a mouthful of baba like a lackey finishing off a bottle behind a door, or wearing out one's wits with giving and receiving letters like a postman—letters that consist not of a mere couple of tender lines, but expand to five folio volumes to-day and contract to a couple of sheets to-morrow (a tiresome practice); instead of dragging along over the ruts and dodging behind hedges—it would be better to give way to the adorable passion that Jean-Jacques Rousseau envied, to fall frankly in love with a girl like Isaure, with a view to making her my wife, if upon exchange of sentiments our hearts respond to each other; to be Werther, in short, with a happy ending."

'"Which is a common weakness," returned Rastignac without laughing. "Possibly in your place I might plunge into the unspeakable delights of that ascetic course; it possesses the merits of novelty and originality, and it is not very expensive. Your Monna Lisa is sweet, but inane as music for the ballet; I give you warning."

'Rastignac made this last remark in a way which set Beaudenord thinking that his friend had his own motives for disenchanting him; Beaudenord had not been a diplomatist for nothing; he fancied that Rastignac wanted to cut him out. If a man mistakes his vocation, the false start none the less influences him for the rest of his life. Godefroid was so evidently smitten with Mlle. Isaure d'Aldrigger, that Rastignac went off to a tall girl chatting in the card-room.—"Malvina," he said, lowering his voice, "your sister has just netted a fish worth eighteen thousand francs a year. He has a name, a manner, and a certain position in the world; keep an eye upon them; be careful to gain Isaure's confidence; and if they philander, do not let her send a word to him unless you have seen it first——"

'Towards two o'clock in the morning, Isaure was standing beside a diminutive Shepherdess of the Alps, a little woman of forty, coquettish as a Zerlina. A footman announced that "Mme. la Baronne's carriage stops the way," and Godefroid forthwith saw his beautiful maiden out of a German song draw her fantastical mother into the cloakroom, whither Malvina followed them; and (boy that he was) he must needs go to discover into what pot of preserves the infant Joby had fallen, and had the pleasure of watching Isaure and Malvina coaxing that sparkling person, their mamma, into her pelisse, with all the little tender precautions required for a night journey in Paris. Of course, the girls on their side watched Beaudenord out of the corners of their eyes, as well-taught kittens watch a mouse, without seeming to see it at all. With a certain satisfaction Beaudenord noted the bearing, manner, and appearance, of the tall well-gloved Alsacien servant in livery who brought three pairs of fur-lined overshoes for his mistresses.

'Never were two sisters more unlike than Isaure and Malvina. Malvina the elder was tall and dark-haired, Isaure was short and fair, and her features were finely and delicately cut, while her sister's were vigorous and striking. Isaure was one of those women who reign like queens through their weakness, such a woman as a schoolboy would feel it incumbent upon him to protect; Malvina was the *Andalouse* of Musset's poem. As the sisters stood together, Isaure looked like a miniature beside a portrait in oils.

'"She is rich!" exclaimed Godefroid, going back to Rastignac in the ballroom.

'"Who?"

'"That young lady."

'"Oh, Isaure d'Aldrigger? Why, yes. The mother is a widow; Nucingen was once a clerk in her husband's bank at Strasbourg. Do you want to see them

again? Just turn off a compliment for Mme. de Restaud; she is giving a ball the day after to-morrow; the Baroness d'Aldrigger and her two daughters will be there. You will have an invitation."

'For three days Godefroid beheld Isaure in the camera obscura of his brain—*his* Isaure with her white camellias and the little ways she had with her head—saw her as you still see the bright thing on which you have been gazing after your eyes are shut, a picture grown somewhat smaller; a radiant, brightly-coloured vision flashing out of a vortex of darkness.'

'Bixiou, you are dropping into phenomena, block us out our pictures,' put in Couture.

'Here you are, gentlemen! Here is the picture you ordered!' (from the tones of Bixiou's voice, he evidently was posing as a waiter.) 'Finot! attention, one has to pull at your mouth as a jarvie pulls at his jade. In Madame Theodora Marguerite Wilhelmine Adolphus (of the firm of Adolphus and Company, Mannheim), relict of the late Baron d'Aldrigger, you might expect to find a stout, comfortable German, compact and prudent, with a fair complexion mellowed to the tint of the foam on a pot of beer; and as to virtues, rich in all the patriarchal good qualities that Germany possesses—in romances, that is to say. Well there was not a grey hair in the frisky ringlets that she wore on either side of her face; she was still as fresh and as brightly coloured on the cheek-bone as a Nuremberg doll; her eyes were lively and bright; a closely-fitting, pointed bodice set off the slenderness of her waist. Her brow and temples were furrowed by a few involuntary wrinkles which, like Ninon, she would fain have banished from her head to her heel, but they persisted in tracing their zigzags in the more conspicuous place. The outlines of the nose had somewhat fallen away, and the tip had reddened, and this was the more awkward because it matched the colour on the cheek-bones.

'An only daughter and an heiress, spoilt by her father and mother, spoilt by her husband and the city of Strasbourg, spoilt still by two daughters who worshipped their mother, the Baroness d'Aldrigger indulged a taste for rose colour, short petticoats, and a knot of ribbon at the point of the tightly-fitting corselet bodice. Any Parisian meeting the Baroness on the boulevard would smile and condemn her outright; he does not admit any plea of extenuating circumstances, like a modern jury on a case of fratricide. A scoffer is always superficial, and in consequence cruel; the rascal never thinks of throwing the proper share of ridicule on society that made the individual what he is; for Nature only makes dull animals of us, we owe the fool to artificial conditions.'

'The thing that I admire about Bixiou is his completeness,' said Blondet; 'whenever he is not gibing at others, he is laughing at himself.'

'I will be even with you for that, Blondet,' returned Bixiou in a significant tone. 'If the little Baroness was giddy, careless, selfish, and incapable in practical matters, she was not accountable for her sins; the responsibility is divided between the firm of Adolphus and Company of Mannheim and Baron d'Aldrigger with his blind love for his wife. The Baroness was as gentle as a lamb; she had a soft heart that was very readily moved; unluckily, the emotion never lasted long, but it was all the more frequently renewed.

'When the Baron died, for instance, the Shepherdess all but followed him to the tomb, so violent and sincere was her grief, but—next morning there were green peas at lunch, she was fond of green peas, the delicious green peas calmed the crisis. Her daughters and her servants loved her so blindly that the whole household rejoiced over a circumstance that enabled them to hide the dolorous spectacle of the funeral from the sorrowing Baroness. Isaure and Malvina would not allow their idolised mother to see their tears.

'While the Requiem was chanted, they diverted her thoughts to the choice of mourning dresses. While the coffin was placed in the huge, black and white, wax-besprinkled catafalque that does duty for some three thousand dead in the course of its career—so I was informed by a philosophically-minded mute whom I once consulted on the point over a couple of glasses of *petit blanc*—while an indifferent choir was bawling the *Dies iræ*, and a no less indifferent priest mumbling the office for the dead, do you know what the friends of the departed were saying as, all dressed in black from head to foot, they sat or stood in the church? (Here is the picture you ordered.) Stay, do you see them?

'"How much do you suppose old d'Aldrigger will leave?" Desroches asked of Taillefer.—You remember Taillefer that gave us the finest orgie ever known not long before he died?'

'But was Desroches an attorney in those days?'

'He was in treaty for a practice in 1822,' said Couture. 'It was a bold thing to do, for he was the son of a poor clerk who never made more than eighteen hundred francs a year, and his mother sold stamped paper. But he worked very hard from 1818 to 1822. He was Derville's fourth clerk when he came; and in 1819 he was second!'

'Desroches?'

'Yes. Desroches, like the rest of us, once grovelled in the poverty of Job. He grew so tired of wearing coats too tight and sleeves too short for him, that he swallowed down the law in desperation and had just bought a bare licence. He was a licensed attorney, without a penny, or a client, or any friends beyond our set; and he was bound to pay interest on the purchase-money and the cautionary deposit besides.'

'He used to make me feel as if I had met a tiger escaped from the Jardin des Plantes,' said Couture. 'He was lean and red-haired, his eyes were the colour of

Spanish snuff, and his complexion was harsh. He looked cold and phlegmatic. He was hard upon the widow, pitiless to the orphan, and a terror to his clerks; they were not allowed to waste a minute. Learned, crafty, double-faced, honey-tongued, never flying into a passion, rancorous in his judicial way.'

'But there is goodness in him,' cried Finot; 'he is devoted to his friends. The first thing he did was to take Godeschal, Mariette's brother, as his head-clerk.'

'At Paris,' said Blondet, 'there are attorneys of two shades. There is the honest man attorney; he abides within the province of the law, pushes on his cases, neglects no one, never runs after business, gives his clients his honest opinion, and makes them compromise on doubtful points—he is a Derville, in short. Then there is the starveling attorney, to whom anything seems good provided that he is sure of expenses; he will set, not mountains fighting, for he sells them, but planets; he will work to make the worse appear the better cause, and take advantage of a technical error to win the day for a rogue. If one of these fellows tries one of Maître Gonin's tricks once too often, the guild forces him to sell his connection. Desroches, our friend Desroches, understood the full resources of a trade carried on in a beggarly way enough by poor devils; he would buy up causes of men who feared to lose the day; he plunged into chicanery with a fixed determination to make money by it. He was right; he did his business very honestly. He found influence among men in public life by getting them out of awkward complications; there was our dear des Lupeaulx, for instance, whose position was so deeply compromised. And Desroches stood in need of influence; for when he began, he was anything but well looked on at the court, and he who took so much trouble to rectify the errors of his clients was often in trouble himself. See now, Bixiou, to go back to the subject—How came Desroches to be in the church?'

'"D'Aldrigger is leaving seven or eight hundred thousand francs," Taillefer answered, addressing Desroches.

'"Oh, pooh, there is only one man who knows how much *they* are worth," put in Werbrust, a friend of the deceased.

'"Who?"

'"That fat rogue Nucingen; he will go as far as the cemetery; d'Aldrigger was his master once, and out of gratitude he put the old man's capital into his business."

'"The widow will soon feel a great difference."

'"What do you mean?"

'"Well, d'Aldrigger was so fond of his wife. Now, don't laugh, people are looking at us."

'"Look, here comes du Tillet; he is very late. The epistle is just beginning."

'"He will marry the eldest girl in all probability."

'"Is it possible?" asked Desroches; "why, he is tied more than ever to Mme. Roguin."

'"*Tied*—he?—You do not know him."

'"Do you know how Nucingen and du Tillet stand?" asked Desroches.

'"Like this," said Taillefer; "Nucingen is just the man to swallow down his old master's capital, and then to disgorge it."

'"Ugh! ugh!" coughed Werbrust, "these churches are confoundedly damp; ugh! ugh! What do you mean by 'disgorge it'?"

'"Well, Nucingen knows that du Tillet has a lot of money; he wants to marry him to Malvina; but du Tillet is shy of Nucingen. To a looker-on, the game is good fun."

'"What!" exclaimed Werbrust, "is she old enough to marry? How quickly we grow old!"

'"Malvina d'Aldrigger is quite twenty years old, my dear fellow. Old d'Aldrigger was married in 1800. He gave some rather fine entertainments in Strasbourg at the time of his wedding, and afterwards when

Malvina was born. That was in 1801 at the peace of Amiens, and here are we in the year 1823, Daddy Werbrust! In those days everything was Ossianised; he called his daughter Malvina. Six years afterwards there was a rage for chivalry, *Partant pour la Syrie*—a pack of nonsense—and he christened his second daughter Isaure. She is seventeen. So there are two daughters to marry."

'"The women will not have a penny left in ten years' time," said Werbrust, speaking to Desroches in a confidential tone.

'"There is d'Aldrigger's man-servant, the old fellow bellowing away at the back of the church; he has been with them since the two young ladies were children, and he is capable of anything to keep enough together for them to live upon," said Taillefer.

'*Dies iræ*! (from the minor canons.) *Dies illa*! (from the choristers.)

'"Good-day, Werbrust" (from Taillefer), "the *Dies iræ* puts me too much in mind of my poor boy."

'"I shall go too; it is too damp in here," said Werbrust.

'*In favilla.*

'"A few halfpence, kind gentlemen!" (from the beggars at the door.)

'"For the expenses of the church!" (from the beadle, with a rattling clatter of the money-box.)

'*Amen* (from the choristers.)

'"What did he die of?" (from a friend.)

'"He broke a blood-vessel in the heel" (from an inquisitive wag).

'"Who is dead?" (from a passer-by.)

'"The President de Montesquieu!" (from a relative.)

'The sacristan to the poor, "Get away, all of you; the money for you has been given to us; don't ask for any more."'

'Done to the life!' cried Couture. And indeed it seemed to us that we heard all that went on in the

church. Bixiou imitated everything, even the shuffling sound of the feet of the men that carried the coffin over the stone floor.

'There are poets and romancers and writers that say many fine things about Parisian manners,' continued Bixiou, 'but that is what really happens at a funeral. Ninety-nine out of a hundred that come to pay their respects to some poor devil departed, get together and talk business or pleasure in the middle of the church. To see some poor little touch of real sorrow, you need an impossible combination of circumstances. And, after all, is there such a thing as grief without a thought of self in it?'

'Ugh!' said Blondet. 'Nothing is less respected than death; is it that there is nothing less respectable?'

'It is so common!' resumed Bixiou. 'When the service was over, Nucingen and du Tillet went to the graveside. The old man-servant walked; Nucingen and du Tillet were put at the head of the procession of mourning coaches.—"Goot, mein goot friend," said Nucingen as they turned into the boulevard. "It ees a goot time to marry Malfina; you vill be der brodector off dat boor family vat ees in tears; you vill haf ein family, a home off your own; you vill haf a house ready vurnished, und Malfina is truly ein dreashure."

'I seem to hear that old Robert Macaire of a Nucingen himself,' said Finot.

'"A charming girl," said Ferdinand du Tillet in a cool, unenthusiastic tone,' Bixiou continued.

'Just du Tillet himself summed up in a word!' cried Couture.

'"Those that do not know her may think her plain," pursued du Tillet, "but she has character, I admit."

'"Und ein herz, dot is the pest of die pizness, mein dear poy; she vould make you an indelligent und defoted vife. In our beastly pizness, nopody cares to know who lifs or dies; it is a crate plessing gif a mann kann put

drust in his vife's heart. Mein Telvine prought me more as a million, as you know, but I should gladly gif her for Malfina dot haf not so pig a *dot*."

'"But how much has she?"

'"I do not know precisely; boot she haf somdings."

'"Yes, she has a mother with a great liking for rose-colour," said du Tillet; and with that epigram he cut Nucingen's diplomatic efforts short.

'After dinner the Baron de Nucingen informed Wilhelmine Adolphus that she had barely four hundred thousand francs deposited with him. The daughter of Adolphus of Mannheim, thus reduced to an income of twenty-four thousand livres, lost herself in arithmetical exercises that muddled her wits.

'"I have *always* had six thousand francs for our dress allowance," she said to Malvina. "Why, how did your father find money? We shall have nothing now with twenty-four thousand francs; it is destitution! Oh! if my father could see me so come down in the world, it would kill him if he were not dead already! Poor Wilhelmine!" and she began to cry.

'Malvina, puzzled to know how to comfort her mother, represented to her that she was still young and pretty, that rose-colour still became her, that she could continue to go to the Opéra and the Bouffons, where Mme. de Nucingen had a box. And so with visions of gaieties, dances, music, pretty dresses, and social success, the Baroness was lulled to sleep and pleasant dreams in the blue, silk-curtained bed in the charming room next to the chamber in which Jean Baptiste, Baron d'Aldrigger, had breathed his last but two nights ago.

'Here in a few words is the Baron's history. During his lifetime that worthy Alsacien accumulated about three millions of francs. In 1800, at the age of thirty-six, in the apogee of a fortune made during the Revolution, he made a marriage partly of ambition, partly of inclination, with the heiress of the family of Adolphus

of Mannheim. Wilhelmine, being the idol of her whole family, naturally inherited their wealth after some ten years. Next, d'Aldrigger's fortune being doubled, he was transformed into a Baron by His Majesty, Emperor and King, and forthwith became a fanatical admirer of the great man to whom he owed his title. Wherefore, between 1814 and 1815 he ruined himself by a too serious belief in the sun of Austerlitz. Honest Alsacien as he was, he did not suspend payment, nor did he give his creditors shares in doubtful concerns by way of settlement. He paid everything over the counter, and retired from business, thoroughly deserving Nucingen's comment on his behaviour—"Honest but stoobid."

'All claims satisfied, there remained to him five hundred thousand francs and certain receipts for sums advanced to that Imperial Government, which had ceased to exist. "See vat komms of too much pelief in Nappolion," said he, when he had realised all his capital.

'When you have been one of the leading men in a place, how are you to remain in it when your estate has dwindled? D'Aldrigger, like all ruined provincials, removed to Paris, there intrepidly wore the tricolour braces embroidered with Imperial eagles, and lived entirely in Bonapartist circles. His capital he handed over to Nucingen, who gave him eight per cent. upon it, and took over the loans to the Imperial Government at a mere sixty per cent. of reduction; wherefore d'Aldrigger squeezed Nucingen's hand and said, "I knew dot in you I should find de heart of ein Elzacien." (Nucingen was paid in full through our friend des Lupeaulx.) Well fleeced as d'Aldrigger had been, he still possessed an income of forty-four thousand francs; but his mortification was further complicated by the spleen which lies in wait for the business man so soon as he retires from business. He set himself, noble heart, to

sacrifice himself to his wife, now that her fortune was lost, that fortune of which she had allowed herself to be despoiled so easily, after the manner of a girl entirely ignorant of money matters. Mme. d'Aldrigger accordingly missed not a single pleasure to which she had been accustomed ; any void caused by the loss of Strasbourg acquaintances was speedily filled, and more than filled, with Paris gaieties. Even then, as now, the Nucingens lived at the higher end of financial society, and the Baron de Nucingen made it a point of honour to treat the honest banker well. His disinterested virtue looked well in the Nucingen salon.

'Every winter dipped into d'Aldrigger's principal, but he did not venture to remonstrate with his pearl of a Wilhelmine. His was the most ingenious unintelligent tenderness in the world. A good man, but a stupid one! "What will become of them when I am gone?" he said, as he lay dying ; and when he was left alone for a moment with Wirth, his old man-servant, he struggled for breath to bid him take care of his mistress and her two daughters, as if the one reasonable being in the house were this Alsacien Caleb Balderstone.

'Three years afterwards, in 1826, Isaure was twenty years old, and Malvina still unmarried. Malvina had gone into society, and in course of time discovered for herself how superficial their friendships were, how accurately every one was weighed and appraised. Like most girls that have been "well brought up," as we say, Malvina had no idea of the mechanism of life, of the importance of money, of the difficulty of obtaining it, of the prices of things. And so, for six years, every lesson that she had learned had been a painful one for her.

'D'Aldrigger's four hundred thousand francs were carried to the credit of the Baroness's account with the firm of Nucingen (she was her husband's creditor for twelve hundred thousand francs under her marriage

settlement), and when in any difficulty the Shepherdess of the Alps dipped into her capital as though it were inexhaustible.

'When our pigeon first advanced towards his dove, Nucingen, knowing the Baroness's character, must have spoken plainly to Malvina on the financial position. At that time three hundred thousand francs were left; the income of twenty-four thousand francs was reduced to eighteen thousand. Wirth had kept up this state of things for three years! After that confidential interview, Malvina put down the carriage, sold the horses, and dismissed the coachman, without her mother's knowledge. The furniture, now ten years old, could not be renewed, but it all faded together, and for those that like harmony the effect was not half bad. The Baroness herself, that so well-preserved flower, began to look like the last solitary frost-touched rose on a November bush. I myself watched the slow decline of luxury by half-tones and semitones! Frightful, upon my honour! It was my last trouble of the kind; afterwards I said to myself, "It is silly to care so much about other people." But while I was in the civil service, I was fool enough to take a personal interest in the houses where I dined; I used to stand up for them; I would say no ill of them myself; I—oh! I was a child.

'Well, when the *ci-devant* pearl's daughter put the state of the case before her, "Oh, my poor children," cried she, "who will make my dresses now? I cannot afford new bonnets; I cannot see visitors here nor go out."—Now by what token do you know that a man is in love?' said Bixiou, interrupting himself. 'The question is, whether Beaudenord was genuinely in love with the fair-haired girl.'

'He neglects his interests,' said Couture.

'He changes his shirt three times a day,' from Finot.

'There is another question to settle first,' opined

Blondet; 'a man of more than ordinary ability, can he, and ought he, to fall in love?'

'My friends,' resumed Bixiou, with a sentimental air, 'there is a kind of man who, when he feels that he is in peril of falling in love, will snap his fingers or fling away his cigar (as the case may be) with a "Pooh! there are other women in the world." Beware of that man for a dangerous reptile. Still, the Government may employ that citizen somewhere in the Foreign Office. Blondet, I call your attention to the fact that this Godefroid had thrown up diplomacy.'

'Well, he was absorbed,' said Blondet. 'Love gives the fool his one chance of growing great.'

'Blondet, Blondet, how is it that we are so poor?' cried Bixiou.

'And why is Finot so rich?' returned Blondet. 'I will tell you how it is; there, my son, we understand each other. Come, here is Finot filling up my glass as if I had carried in his firewood. At the end of dinner one ought to sip one's wine slowly.—Well?'

'Thou hast said. The absorbed Godefroid became fully acquainted with the family—the tall Malvina, the frivolous Baroness, and the little lady of the dance. He became a servant after the most conscientious and restricted fashion. He was not scared away by the cadaverous remains of opulence; not he! by degrees he became accustomed to the threadbare condition of things. It never struck the young man that the green silk damask and white ornaments in the drawing-room were shabby, spotted, and old-fashioned, and that the room needed refurnishing. The curtains, the tea-table, the knick-knacks on the chimney-piece, the rococo chandelier, the Eastern carpet with the pile worn down to the thread, the pianoforte, the little flowered china cups, the fringed serviettes so full of holes that they looked like open work in the Spanish fashion, the green sitting-room with the Baroness's blue bedroom beyond it,—it

was all sacred, all dear to him. It is only your stupid woman with the brilliant beauty that throws heart, brain, and soul into the shade, who can inspire forgetfulness like this; a clever woman never abuses her advantages; she must be small-natured and silly to gain such a hold upon a man. Beaudenord actually loved the solemn old Wirth—he has told me so himself!

'That old rogue regarded his future master with the awe which a good Catholic feels for the Eucharist. Honest Wirth was a kind of Gaspard, a beer-drinking German sheathing his cunning in good-nature, much as a cardinal in the Middle Ages kept his dagger up his sleeve. Wirth saw a husband for Isaure, and accordingly proceeded to surround Godefroid with the mazy circumlocutions of his Alsacien's geniality, that most adhesive of all known varieties of bird-lime.

'Mme. d'Aldrigger was radically "improper." She thought love the most natural thing imaginable. When Isaure and Malvina went out together to the Champs Élysées or the Tuileries, where they were sure to meet the young men of their set, she would simply say, "A pleasant time to you, dear girls." Their friends among men, the only persons who might have slandered the sisters, championed them; for the extraordinary liberty permitted in the d'Aldriggers' salon made it unique in Paris. Vast wealth would scarcely have procured such evenings, the talk was good on any subject; dress was not insisted upon; you felt so much at home there that you could ask for supper. The sisters corresponded as they pleased, and quietly read their letters by their mother's side; it never occurred to the Baroness to interfere in any way; the adorable woman gave the girls the full benefits of her selfishness, and in a certain sense selfish persons are the easiest to live with; they hate trouble, and therefore do not trouble other people; they never beset the lives of their fellow-creatures with thorny advice and captious fault-finding; nor do they torment

you with the waspish solicitude of excessive affection that must know all things and rule all things——'

'This comes home,' said Blondet, 'but, my dear fellow, this is not telling a story, this is *blague*——'

'Blondet, if you were not tipsy, I should really feel hurt! He is the one serious literary character among us; for his benefit, I honour you by treating you like men of taste, I am distilling my tale for you, and now he criticises me! There is no greater proof of intellectual sterility, my friends, than the piling up of facts. *Le Misanthrope*, that supreme comedy, shows us that art consists in the power of building a palace on a needle's point. The gist of my idea is in the fairy wand which can turn the Desert into an Interlaken in ten seconds (precisely the time required to empty this glass). Would you rather that I fired a story off at you like a cannon-ball, or a commander-in-chief's report? We chat and laugh; and this journalist, a bibliophobe when sober, expects me, forsooth, when he is drunk, to teach my tongue to move at the dull jog-trot of a printed book.' (Here he affected to weep.) 'Woe unto the French imagination when men fain would blunt the needle points of her pleasant humour! *Dies irae!* Let us weep for *Candide*. Long live the *Kritik of Pure Reason*, *La Symbolique*, and the systems in five closely packed volumes, printed by Germans, who little suspect that the gist of the matter has been known in Paris since 1750, and crystallised in a few trenchant words—the diamonds of our national thought. Blondet is driving a hearse to his own suicide; Blondet, forsooth! who manufactures newspaper accounts of the last words of all the great men that die without saying anything!'

'Come, get on,' put in Finot.

'It was my intention to explain to you in what the happiness of a man consists when he is not a shareholder (out of compliment to Couture). Well, now, do you not see at what a price Godefroid secured the greatest

happiness of a young man's dream? He was trying to understand Isaure, by way of making sure that she should understand him. Things which comprehend one another must needs be similar. Infinity and Nothingness, for instance, are like; everything that lies between the two is like neither. Nothingness is stupidity; genius, Infinity. The lovers wrote each other the stupidest letters imaginable, putting down various expressions then in fashion upon bits of scented paper: "Angel! Æolian harp! with thee I shall be complete! There is a heart in my man's breast! Weak woman, poor me!" all the latest heart-frippery. It was Godefroid's wont to stay in a drawing-room for a bare ten minutes; he talked without any pretension to the women in it, and at those times they thought him very clever. In short, judge of his absorption; Joby, his horses and carriages, became secondary interests in his life. He was never happy except in the depths of a snug settee opposite the Baroness, by the dark-green porphyry chimney-piece, watching Isaure, taking tea, and chatting with the little circle of friends that dropped in every evening between eleven and twelve in the Rue Joubert. You could play bouillotte there safely. (I always won.) Isaure sat with one little foot thrust out in its black satin shoe; Godefroid would gaze and gaze, and stay till every one else was gone, and say, "Give me your shoe!" and Isaure would put her little foot on a chair and take it off and give it to him, with a glance, one of those glances that—in short, you understand.

'At length Godefroid discovered a great mystery in Malvina. Whenever du Tillet knocked at the door, the live red that coloured Malvina's face said "Ferdinand!" When the poor girl's eyes fell on that two-footed tiger, they lighted up like a brazier fanned by a current of air. When Ferdinand drew her away to the window or a side table, she betrayed her secret infinite joy. It is a rare and beautiful thing to see a woman so much in love

that she loses her cunning to be strange, and you can read her heart; as rare (dear me!) in Paris as the Singing Flower in the Indies. But in spite of a friendship dating from the d'Aldriggers' first appearance at the Nucingens', Ferdinand did not marry Malvina. Our ferocious friend was not apparently jealous of Desroches, who paid assiduous court to the young lady; Desroches wanted to pay off the rest of the purchase-money due for his connection; Malvina could not well have less than fifty thousand crowns, he thought, and so the lawyer was fain to play the lover. Malvina, deeply humiliated as she was by du Tillet's carelessness, loved him too well to shut the door upon him. With her, an enthusiastic, highly-wrought, sensitive girl, love sometimes got the better of pride, and pride again overcame wounded love. Our friend Ferdinand, cool and self-possessed, accepted her tenderness, and breathed the atmosphere with the quiet enjoyment of a tiger licking the blood that dyes his throat. He would come to make sure of it with new proofs; he never allowed two days to pass without a visit to the Rue Joubert.

'At that time the rascal possessed something like eighteen hundred thousand francs; money must have weighed very little with him in the question of marriage; and he had not merely been proof against Malvina, he had resisted the Barons de Nucingen and de Rastignac; though both of them had set him galloping at the rate of seventy-five leagues a day, with outriders, regardless of expense, through mazes of their cunning devices—and with never a clue of thread.

'Godefroid could not refrain from saying a word to his future sister-in-law as to her ridiculous position between a banker and an attorney.

'"You mean to read me a lecture on the subject of Ferdinand," she said frankly, "to know the secret between us. Dear Godefroid, never mention this again. Ferdinand's birth, antecedents, and fortune count for

nothing in this, so you may think it is something extraordinary." A few days afterwards, however, Malvina took Godefroid apart to say, "I do not think that Desroches is sincere" (such is the instinct of love); "he would like to marry me, and he is paying court to some tradesman's daughter as well. I should very much like to know whether I am a second shift, and whether marriage is a matter of money with him." The fact was that Desroches, deep as he was, could not make out du Tillet, and was afraid that he might marry Malvina. So the fellow had secured his retreat. His position was intolerable, he was scarcely paying his expenses and interest on the debt. Women understand nothing of these things; for them, love is always a millionaire.'

'But since neither du Tillet nor Desroches married her, just explain Ferdinand's motive,' said Finot.

'Motive?' repeated Bixiou; 'why, this. General Rule: A girl that has once given away her slipper, even if she refused it for ten years, is never married by the man who——'

'Bosh!' interrupted Blondet, 'one reason for loving is the fact that one has loved. His motive? Here it is. General Rule: Do not marry as a sergeant when some day you may be Duke of Dantzig and Marshal of France. Now, see what a match du Tillet has made since then. He married one of the Comte de Granville's daughters, into one of the oldest families in the French magistracy.'

'Desroches' mother had a friend, a druggist's wife,' continued Bixiou. 'Said druggist had retired with a fat fortune. These druggist folk have absurdly crude notions; by way of giving his daughter a good education, he had sent her to a boarding-school! Well, Matifat meant the girl to marry well, on the strength of two hundred thousand francs, good hard coin with no scent of drugs about it.'

'Florine's Matifat?' asked Blondet.

'Well, yes. Lousteau's Matifat; ours, in fact. The Matifats, even then lost to us, had gone to live in the Rue du Cherche-Midi, as far as may be from the Rue des Lombards, where their money was made. For my own part, I had cultivated those Matifats. While I served my time in the galleys of the law, when I was cooped up for eight hours out of the twenty-four with nincompoops of the first water, I saw queer characters enough to convince myself that all is not dead-level even in obscure places, and that in the flattest inanity you may chance upon an angle. Yes, dear boy, such and such a philistine is to such another as Rafael is to Natoire.

'Mme. Desroches, the widowed mother, had long ago planned this marriage for her son, in spite of a tremendous obstacle which took the shape of one Cochin, Matifat's partner's son, a young clerk in the audit department. M. and Mme. Matifat were of the opinion that an attorney's position "gave some guarantee for a wife's happiness," to use their own expression; and as for Desroches, he was prepared to fall in with his mother's views in case he could do no better for himself. Wherefore, he kept up his acquaintance with the druggists in the Rue du Cherche-Midi.

'To put another kind of happiness before you, you should have a description of these shopkeepers, male and female. They rejoiced in the possession of a handsome ground floor and a strip of garden; for amusement, they watched a little squirt of water, no bigger than a corn-stalk, perpetually rising and falling upon a small round freestone slab in the middle of a basin some six feet across; they would rise early of a morning to see if the plants in the garden had grown in the night; they had nothing to do, they were restless, they dressed for the sake of dressing, bored themselves at the theatre, and were for ever going to and fro between Paris and Luzarches, where they had a country house. I have dined there.

'Once they tried to quiz me, Blondet. I told them a long-winded story that lasted from nine o'clock till midnight, one tale inside another. I had just brought my twenty-ninth personage upon the scene (the newspapers have plagiarised with their "continued in our next"), when old Matifat, who as host still held out, snored like the rest, after blinking for five minutes. Next day they all complimented me upon the ending of my tale!

'These tradespeople's society consisted of M. and Mme. Cochin, Mme. Desroches, and a young Popinot, still in the drug business, who used to bring them news of the Rue des Lombards. (You know him, Finot.) Mme. Matifat loved the arts; she bought lithographs, chromo-lithographs, and coloured prints,—all the cheapest things she could lay her hands on. The Sieur Matifat amused himself by looking into new business speculations, investing a little capital now and again for the sake of the excitement. Florine had cured him of his taste for the Regency style of thing. One saying of his will give you some idea of the depths in my Matifat. "Art *thou* going to bed, my nieces?" he used to say when he wished them good-night, because (as he explained) he was afraid of hurting their feelings with the more formal "you."

'The daughter was a girl with no manner at all. She looked rather like a superior sort of housemaid. She could get through a sonata, she wrote a pretty English hand, knew French grammar and orthography—a complete commercial education, in short. She was impatient enough to be married and leave the paternal roof, finding it as dull at home as a lieutenant finds the night-watch at sea; at the same time, it should be said that her watch lasted through the whole twenty-four hours. Desroches or Cochin junior, a notary or a lifeguardsman, or a sham English lord,—any husband would have suited her. As she so obviously knew nothing of life, I took pity upon her, I determined to reveal the great

secret of it. But, pooh! the Matifats shut their doors on me. The bourgeois and I shall never understand each other.'

'She married General Gouraud,' said Finot.

'In forty-eight hours, Godefroid de Beaudenord, late of the diplomatic corps, saw through the Matifats and their nefarious designs,' resumed Bixiou. 'Rastignac happened to be chatting with the frivolous Baroness when Godefroid came in to give his report to Malvina. A word here and there reached his ear; he guessed the matter on foot, more particularly from Malvina's look of satisfaction that it was as she had suspected. Then Rastignac actually stopped on till two o'clock in the morning. And yet there are those that call him selfish! Beaudenord took his departure when the Baroness went to bed.

'As soon as Rastignac was left alone with Malvina, he spoke in a fatherly, good-humoured fashion. "Dear child, please to bear in mind that a poor fellow, heavy with sleep, has been drinking tea to keep himself awake till two o'clock in the morning, all for a chance of saying a solemn word of advice to you—*Marry!* Do not be too particular; do not brood over your feelings; never mind the sordid schemes of men that have one foot here and another in the Matifats' house; do not stop to think at all: Marry!—When a girl marries, it means that the man whom she marries undertakes to maintain her in a more or less good position in life, and at any rate her comfort is assured. I know the world. Girls, mammas, and grandmammas are all of them hypocrites when they fly off into sentiment over a question of marriage. Nobody really thinks of anything but a good position. If a mother marries her daughter well, she says that she has made an excellent bargain." Here Rastignac unfolded his theory of marriage, which to his way of thinking is a business arrangement, with a view to making life tolerable; and

ended up with, "I do not ask to know your secret, Malvina; I know it already. Men talk things over among themselves, just as you women talk after you leave the dinner-table. This is all I have to say: Marry. If you do not, remember that I begged you to marry, here, in this room, this evening!"

'There was a certain ring in Rastignac's voice which compelled, not attention, but reflection. There was something startling in his insistence; something that went, as Rastignac meant that it should, to the quick of Malvina's intelligence. She thought over the counsel again next day, and vainly asked herself why it had been given.'

Couture broke in. 'In all these tops that you have set spinning, I see nothing at all like the beginnings of Rastignac's fortune,' said he. 'You apparently take us for Matifats multiplied by half-a-dozen bottles of champagne.'

'We are just coming to it,' returned Bixiou. 'You have followed the course of all the rivulets which make up that forty thousand livres a year which so many people envy. By this time Rastignac held the threads of all these lives in his hand.'

'Desroches, the Matifats, Beaudenord, the d'Aldriggers, d'Aiglemont?'

'Yes, and a hundred others,' assented Bixiou.

'Oh, come now, how?' cried Finot. 'I know a few things, but I cannot see a glimpse of an answer to this riddle.'

'Blondet has roughly given you the account of Nucingen's first two suspensions of payment; now for the third, with full details.—After the peace of 1815, Nucingen grasped an idea which some of us only fully understood later, to wit, that capital is a power only when you are very much richer than other people. In his own mind, he was jealous of the Rothschilds. He had five millions of francs, he wanted ten. He knew a

way to make thirty millions with ten, while with five he could only make fifteen. So he made up his mind to operate a third suspension of payment. About that time, the great man hit on the idea of indemnifying his creditors with paper of purely fictitious value and keeping their coin. On the market, a great idea of this sort is not expressed in precisely this cut-and-dried way. Such an arrangement consists in giving a lot of grown-up children a small pie in exchange for a gold piece; and, like children of a smaller growth, they prefer the pie to the gold piece, not suspecting that they might have a couple of hundred pies for it.'

'What is all this about, Bixiou?' cried Couture. 'Nothing more *bonâ fide*. Not a week passes but pies are offered to the public for a louis. But who compels the public to take them? Are they not perfectly free to make inquiries?'

'You would rather have it made compulsory to take up shares, would you?' asked Blondet.

'No,' said Finot. 'Where would the talent come in?'

'Very good for Finot.'

'Who put him up to it?' asked Couture.

'The fact was,' continued Bixiou, 'that Nucingen had twice had the luck to present the public (quite unintentionally) with a pie that turned out to be worth more than the money he received for it. That unlucky good luck gave him qualms of conscience. A course of such luck is fatal to a man in the long run. This time he meant to make no mistake of this sort; he waited ten years for an opportunity of issuing negotiable securities which should seem on the face of it to be worth something, while as a matter of fact——'

'But if you look at banking in that light,' broke in Couture, 'no sort of business would be possible. More than one *bonâ fide* banker, backed up by a *bonâ fide* government, has induced the hardest-headed men on

'Change to take up stock which was bound to fall within a given time. You have seen better than that. Have you not seen stock created with the concurrence of a government to pay the interest upon older stock, so as to keep things going and tide over the difficulty? These operations were more or less like Nucingen's settlements.'

'The thing may look queer on a small scale,' said Blondet, 'but on a large we call it finance. There are high-handed proceedings criminal between man and man that amount to nothing when spread out over any number of men, much as a drop of prussic acid becomes harmless in a pail of water. You take a man's life, you are guillotined. But if, for any political conviction whatsoever, you take five hundred lives, political crimes are respected. You take five thousand francs out of my desk; to the hulks you go. But with a sop cleverly pushed into the jaws of a thousand speculators, you can cram the stock of any bankrupt republic or monarchy down their throats; even if the loan has been floated, as Couture says, to pay the interest on that very same national debt. Nobody can complain. These are the real principles of the present Golden Age.'

'When the stage machinery is so huge,' continued Bixiou, 'a good many puppets are required. In the first place, Nucingen had purposely and with his eyes open invested his five millions in an American investment, foreseeing that the profits would not come in until it was too late. The firm of Nucingen deliberately emptied its coffers. Any liquidation ought to be brought about naturally. In deposits belonging to private individuals and other investments, the firm possessed about six millions of capital altogether. Among those private individuals was the Baroness d'Aldrigger with her three hundred thousand francs, Beaudenord with four hundred thousand, d'Aiglemont with a million, Matifat with three hundred thousand, Charles Grandet

(who married Mlle. d'Aubrion) with half a million, and so forth, and so forth.

'Now, if Nucingen had himself brought out a joint-stock company, with the shares of which he proposed to indemnify his creditors after more or less ingenious manœuvring, he might perhaps have been suspected. He set about it more cunningly than that. He made some one else put up the machinery that was to play the part of the Mississippi scheme in Law's system. Nucingen can make the longest-headed men work out his schemes for him without confiding a word to them; it is his peculiar talent. Nucingen just let fall a hint to du Tillet of the pyramidal, triumphant notion of bringing out a joint-stock enterprise with capital sufficient to pay very high dividends for a time. Tried for the first time, in days when noodles with capital were plentiful, the plan was pretty sure to end in a run upon the shares, and consequently in a profit for the banker that issued them. You must remember that this happened in 1826.

'Du Tillet, struck though he was by an idea both pregnant and ingenious, naturally bethought himself that if the enterprise failed, the blame must fall upon somebody. For which reason, it occurred to him to put forward a figurehead director in charge of his commercial machinery. At this day you know the secret of the firm of Claparon and Company, founded by du Tillet, one of the finest inventions——'

'Yes,' said Blondet, 'the responsible editor in business matters, the instigator, and scapegoat; but we know better than that nowadays. We put, "Apply at the offices of the Company, such and such a number, such and such a street," where the public find a staff of clerks in green caps, about as pleasing to behold as broker's men.'

'Nucingen,' pursued Bixiou, 'had supported the firm of Charles Claparon and Company with all his credit. There were markets in which you might safely put

a million francs' worth of Claparon's paper. So du Tillet proposed to bring his firm of Claparon to the fore. So said, so done. In 1825 the shareholder was still an unsophisticated being. There was no such thing as cash lying at call. Managing directors did not pledge themselves not to put their own shares upon the market; they kept no deposit with the Bank of France; they guaranteed nothing. They did not even condescend to explain to shareholders the exact limits of their liabilities when they informed them that the directors, in their goodness, refrained from asking any more than a thousand, or five hundred, or even two hundred and fifty francs. It was not given out that the experiment *in ære publico* was not meant to last for more than seven, five, or even three years, so that shareholders would not have long to wait for the catastrophe. It was in the childhood of the art. Promoters did not even publish the gigantic prospectuses with which they stimulate the imagination, and at the same time make demands for money of all and sundry.'

'That only comes when nobody wishes to part with money,' said Couture.

'In short, there was no competition in investments,' continued Bixiou. 'Papier-mâché manufacturers, cotton printers, zinc-rollers, theatres, and newspapers as yet did not hurl themselves like hunting dogs upon their quarry—the expiring shareholder. "Nice things in shares," as Couture says, put thus artlessly before the public, and backed up by the opinions of experts ("the princes of science"), were negotiated shamefacedly in the silence and shadow of the Bourse. Lynx-eyed speculators used to execute (financially speaking) the air *Calumny* out of *The Barber of Seville*. They went about *piano*, *piano*, making known the merits of the concern through the medium of stock-exchange gossip. They could only exploit the victim in his own house, on the Bourse, or in company; so they reached him by means

of the skilfully created rumour which grew till it reached a *tutti* of a quotation in four figures——'

'And as we can say anything among ourselves,' said Couture, 'I will go back to the last subject.'

'*Vous êtes orfèvre, Monsieur Josse!*' cried Finot.

'Finot will always be classic, constitutional, and pedantic,' commented Blondet.

'Yes,' rejoined Couture, on whose account Cérizet had just been condemned on a criminal charge. 'I maintain that the new way is infinitely less fraudulent, less ruinous, more straightforward than the old. Publicity means time for reflection and inquiry. If here and there a shareholder is taken in, he has himself to blame, nobody sells him a pig in a poke. The manufacturing industry——'

'Ah!' exclaimed Bixiou, 'here comes industry——'

'—— is a gainer by it,' continued Couture, taking no notice of the interruption. 'Every government that meddles with commerce and cannot leave it free, sets about an expensive piece of folly; State interference ends in a *maximum* or a monopoly. To my thinking, few things can be more in conformity with the principles of free trade than joint-stock companies. State interference means that you try to regulate the relations of principal and interest, which is absurd. In business, generally speaking, the profits are in proportion to the risks. What does it matter to the State how money is set circulating, provided that it is always in circulation? What does it matter who is rich or who is poor, provided that there is a constant quantity of rich people to be taxed? Joint-stock companies, limited liability companies, every sort of enterprise that pays a dividend, has been carried on for twenty years in England, commercially the first country in the world. Nothing passes unchallenged there; the Houses of Parliament hatch some twelve hundred laws every session, yet no member of Parliament has ever yet raised an objection to the system——'

'A cure for plethora of the strong box. Purely vegetable remedy,' put in Bixiou, '*les carottes*' (gambling speculation).

'Look here!' cried Couture, firing up at this. 'You have ten thousand francs. You invest it in ten shares of a thousand francs each in ten different enterprises. You are swindled nine times out of the ten—as a matter of fact you are not, the public is a match for anybody, but say that you are swindled, and only one affair turns out well (by accident!—oh, granted!—it was not done on purpose—there, chaff away!). Very well, the punter that has the sense to divide up his stakes in this way hits on a splendid investment, like those did who took shares in the Wortschin mines. Gentlemen, let us admit among ourselves that those who call out are hypocrites, desperately vexed because they have no good ideas of their own, and neither power to advertise nor skill to exploit a business. You will not have long to wait for proof. In a very short time you will see the aristocracy, the court, and public men descend into speculation in serried columns; you will see that their claws are longer, their morality more crooked than ours, while they have not our good points. What a head a man must have if he has to found a business in times when the shareholder is as covetous and keen as the inventor! What a great magnetiser must he be that can create a Claparon and hit upon expedients never tried before! Do you know the moral of it all? Our age is no better than we are; we live in an era of greed; no one troubles himself about the intrinsic value of a thing if he can only make a profit on it by selling it to somebody else; so he passes it on to his neighbour. The shareholder that thinks he sees a chance of making money is just as covetous as the founder that offers him the opportunity of making it.'

'Isn't he fine, our Couture? Isn't he fine?' exclaimed Bixiou, turning to Blondet. 'He will ask us

next to erect statues to him as a benefactor of the species.'

'It would lead people to conclude that the fool's money is the wise man's patrimony by divine right,' said Blondet.

'Gentlemen,' cried Couture, 'let us have our laugh out here to make up for all the times when we must listen gravely to solemn nonsense justifying laws passed on the spur of the moment.'

'He is right,' said Blondet. 'What times we live in, gentlemen! When the fire of intelligence appears among us, it is promptly quenched by haphazard legislation. Almost all our lawgivers come up from little parishes where they studied human nature through the medium of the newspapers; forthwith they shut down the safety-valve, and when the machinery blows up there is weeping and gnashing of teeth! We do nothing nowadays but pass penal laws and levy taxes. Will you have the sum of it all?—There is no religion left in the State!'

'Oh, bravo, Blondet!' cried Bixiou, 'thou hast set thy finger on the weak spot. Meddlesome taxation has lost us more victories here in France than the vexatious chances of war. I once spent seven years in the hulks of a government department, chained with bourgeois to my bench. There was a clerk in the office, a man with a head on his shoulders; he had set his mind upon making a sweeping reform of the whole fiscal system—ah, well, we took the conceit out of him nicely. France might have been too prosperous, you know; she might have amused herself by conquering Europe again; we acted in the interests of the peace of nations. I slew Rabourdin with a caricature.'[1]

'By *religion* I do not mean cant; I use the word in its wide political sense,' rejoined Blondet.

'Explain your meaning,' said Finot.

[1] See *Les Employés*.

'Here it is,' returned Blondet. 'There has been a good deal said about affairs at Lyons; about the Republic cannonaded in the streets; well, there was not a word of truth in it all. The Republic took up the riots, just as an insurgent snatches up a rifle. The truth is queer and profound, I can tell you. The Lyons trade is a soulless trade. They will not weave a yard of silk unless they have the order and are sure of payment. If orders fall off, the workmen may starve; they can scarcely earn a living, convicts are better off. After the Revolution of July, the distress reached such a pitch that the Lyons weavers—the *canuts*, as they call them—hoisted the flag, "Bread or Death!" a proclamation of a kind which compels the attention of a government. It was really brought about by the cost of living at Lyons; Lyons must build theatres and become a metropolis, forsooth, and the octroi duties accordingly were insanely high. The Republicans got wind of this bread riot, they organised the *canuts* in two camps, and fought among themselves. Lyons had her Three Days, but order was restored, and the silk weavers went back to their dens. Hitherto the *canut* had been honest; the silk for his work was weighed out to him in hanks, and he brought back the same weight of woven tissue; now he made up his mind that the silk merchants were oppressing him; he put honesty out at the door and rubbed oil on his fingers. He still brought back weight for weight, but he sold the silk represented by the oil; and the French silk trade has suffered from a plague of "greased silks," which might have ruined Lyons and a whole branch of French commerce. The masters and the government, instead of removing the causes of the evil, simply drove it in with a violent external application. They ought to have sent a clever man to Lyons, one of those men that are said to have no principle, an Abbé Terray; but they looked at the affair from a military point of view. The result of the troubles is a *gros de Naples* at forty

sous per yard; the silk is sold at this day, I dare say, and the masters no doubt have hit upon some new check upon the men. This method of manufacturing without looking ahead ought never to have existed in the country where one of the greatest citizens that France has ever known ruined himself to keep six thousand weavers in work without orders. Richard Lenoir fed them, and the government was thickheaded enough to allow him to suffer from the fall of the prices of textile fabrics brought about by the Revolution of 1814. Richard Lenoir is the one case of a merchant that deserves a statue. And yet the subscription set on foot for him has no subscribers, while the fund for General Foy's children reached a million francs. Lyons has drawn her own conclusions; she knows France, she knows that there is no religion left. The story of Richard Lenoir is one of those blunders which Fouché condemned as worse than a crime.'

'Suppose that there is a tinge of charlatanism in the way in which concerns are put before the public,' began Couture, returning to the charge, 'that word charlatanism has come to be a damaging expression, a middle term, as it were, between right and wrong; for where, I ask you, does charlatanism begin? where does it end? what is charlatanism? do me the kindness of telling me what it is *not*. Now for a little plain speaking, the rarest social ingredient. A business which should consist in going out at night to look for goods to sell in the day would be obviously impossible. You find the instinct of forestalling the market in the very match-seller. How to forestall the market—that is the one idea of the so-called honest tradesman of the Rue Saint-Denis, as of the most brazen-fronted speculator. If stocks are heavy, sell you must. If sales are slow, you must tickle your customer; hence the signs of the Middle Ages, hence the modern prospectus. I do not see a hair's-breadth of difference between attracting

custom and forcing your goods upon the consumer. It may happen, it is sure to happen, it often happens, that a shopkeeper gets hold of damaged goods, for the seller always cheats the buyer. Go and ask the most upright folk in Paris—the best known men in business, that is—and they will all triumphantly tell you of dodges by which they passed off stock which they knew to be bad upon the public. The well-known firm of Minard began by sales of this kind. In the Rue Saint-Denis they sell nothing but "greased silk"; it is all that they can do. The most honest merchants tell you in the most candid way that "you must get out of a bad bargain as best you can"—a motto for the most unscrupulous rascality. Blondet has given you an account of the Lyons affair, its causes and effects, and I proceed in my turn to illustrate my theory with an anecdote:—There was once a woollen weaver, an ambitious man, burdened with a large family of children by a wife too much beloved. He put too much faith in the Republic, laid in a stock of scarlet wool, and manufactured those red-knitted caps that you may have noticed on the heads of all the street urchins in Paris. How this came about I am just going to tell you. The Republic was beaten. After the Saint-Merri affair the caps were quite unsaleable. Now, when a weaver finds that beside a wife and children he has some ten thousand red woollen caps in the house, and that no hatter will take a single one of them, notions begin to pass through his head as fast as if he were a banker racking his brains to get rid of ten million francs' worth of shares in some dubious investment. As for this Law of the Faubourg, this Nucingen of caps, do you know what he did? He went to find a pothouse dandy, one of those comic men that drive police sergeants to despair at open-air dancing saloons at the barriers; him he engaged to play the part of an American captain staying at Meurice's and buying for the export trade. He was to go to some large

hatter, who still had a cap in his shop window, and 'inquire for' ten thousand red woollen caps. The hatter, scenting business in the wind, hurried round to the woollen weaver and rushed upon the stock. After that, no more of the American captain, you understand, and great plenty of caps. If you interfere with the freedom of trade, because free trade has its drawbacks, you might as well tie the hands of justice because a crime sometimes goes unpunished, or blame the bad organisation of society because civilisation produces some evils. From the caps and the Rue Saint-Denis to joint-stock companies and the Bank——draw your own conclusions."

'A crown for Couture!' said Blondet, twisting a serviette into a wreath for his head. 'I go further than that, gentlemen. If there is a defect in the working hypothesis, what is the cause? The law! the whole system of legislation. The blame rests with the legislature. The great men of their districts are sent up to us by the provinces, crammed with parochial notions of right and wrong; and ideas that are indispensable if you want to keep clear of collisions with justice, are stupid when they prevent a man from rising to the height at which a maker of laws ought to abide. Legislation may prohibit such and such developments of human passions—gambling, lotteries, the Ninons of the pavement, anything you please—but you cannot extirpate the passions themselves by any amount of legislation. Abolish them, you would abolish the society which developes them, even if it does not produce them. The gambling passion lurks, for instance, at the bottom of every heart, be it a girl's heart, a provincial's, a diplomatist's; everybody longs to have money without working for it; you may hedge the desire about with restrictions, but the gambling mania immediately breaks out in another form. You stupidly suppress lotteries, but the cook-maid pilfers none the less, and puts her ill-gotten gains in the savings

bank. She gambles with two hundred and fifty franc stakes instead of forty sous; joint-stock companies and speculation take the place of the lottery; the gambling goes on without the green cloth, the croupier's rake is invisible, the cheating planned beforehand. The gambling houses are closed, the lottery has come to an end; "and now," cry idiots, "morals have greatly improved in France," as if, forsooth, they had suppressed the punters. The gambling still goes on, only the State makes nothing from it now; and for a tax paid with pleasure, it has substituted a burdensome duty. Nor is the number of suicides reduced, for the gambler never dies, though his victim does.

'I am not speaking now of foreign capital lost to France,' continued Couture, 'nor of the Frankfort lotteries. The Convention passed a decree of death against those who hawked foreign lottery-tickets, and procureur-syndics used to traffick in them. So much for the sense of our legislator and his drivelling philanthropy. The encouragement given to savings banks is a piece of crass political folly. Suppose that things take a doubtful turn and people lose confidence, the Government will find that they have instituted a queue for money, like the queues outside the bakers' shops. So many savings banks, so many riots. Three street boys hoist a flag in some corner or other, and you have a revolution ready made.

'But this danger, however great it may be, seems to me less to be dreaded than the widespread demoralisation. Savings banks are a means of inoculating the people, the classes least restrained by education or by reason from schemes that are tacitly criminal with the vices bred of self-interest. See what comes of philanthropy!

'A great politician ought to be without a conscience in abstract questions, or he is a bad steersman for a nation. An honest politician is a steam-engine with

feelings, a pilot that would make love at the helm and let the ship go down. A prime minister who helps himself to millions but makes France prosperous and great is preferable, is he not, to a public servant who ruins his country, even though he is buried at the public expense. Would you hesitate between a Richelieu, a Mazarin, or a Potemkin, each with his hundreds of millions of francs, and a conscientious Robert Lindet that could make nothing out of *assignats* and national property, or one of the virtuous imbeciles who ruined Louis XVI.? Go on, Bixiou.'

'I will not go into the details of the speculation which we owe to Nucingen's financial genius. It would be the more inexpedient because the concern is still in existence and shares are quoted on the Bourse. The scheme was so convincing, there was such life in an enterprise sanctioned by royal letters patent, that though the shares issued at a thousand francs fell to three hundred, they rose to seven, and will reach par yet, after weathering the stormy years '27, '30, and '32. The financial crisis of 1827 sent them down; after the Revolution of July they fell flat; but there really is something in the affair, Nucingen simply could not invent a bad speculation. In short, as several banks of the highest standing have been mixed up in the affair, it would be unparliamentary to go further into detail. The nominal capital amounted to ten millions; the real capital to seven. Three millions were allotted to the founders and bankers that brought it out. Everything was done with a view to sending up the shares two hundred francs during the first six months by the payment of a sham dividend. Twenty per cent. on ten millions! Du Tillet's interest in the concern amounted to five hundred thousand francs. In the stock-exchange slang of the day, this share of the spoils was a "sop in the pan." Nucingen, with his millions made by the aid of a lithographer's stone and a handful of pink paper, proposed to himself to operate

certain nice little shares carefully hoarded in his private office till the time came for putting them on the market. The shareholder's money floated the concern, and paid for splendid business premises, so they began operations. And Nucingen held in reserve founders' shares in Heaven knows what coal and argentiferous lead-mines, also in a couple of canals; the shares had been given to him for bringing out the concerns. All four were in working order, well got up and popular, for they paid good dividends.

'Nucingen might, of course, count on getting the differences if the shares went up, but this formed no part of the Baron's schemes; he left the shares at sea-level on the market to tempt the fishes.

'So he had massed his securities as Napoleon massed his troops, all with a view to suspending payment in the thick of the approaching crisis of 1826-27 which revolutionised European markets. If Nucingen had had his Prince of Wagram, he might have said, like Napoleon from the heights of Santon, "Make a careful survey of the situation; on such and such a day, at such an hour funds will be poured in at such a spot." But in whom could he confide? Du Tillet had no suspicion of his own complicity in Nucingen's plot; and the bold Baron had learned from his previous experiments in suspensions of payment that he must have some man whom he could trust to act at need as a lever upon the creditor. Nucingen had never a nephew, he dared not take a confidant; yet he must have a devoted and intelligent Claparon, a born diplomatist with a good manner, a man worthy of him, and fit to take office under government. Such connections are not made in a day nor yet in a year. By this time Rastignac had been so thoroughly entangled by Nucingen, that being, like the Prince de la Paix, equally beloved by the King and Queen of Spain, he fancied that he (Rastignac) had secured a very valuable dupe in *Nucingen!* For a long while he had laughed at

a man whose capacities he was unable to estimate; he ended in a sober, serious, and devout admiration of Nucingen, owning that Nucingen really had the power which he thought that he himself alone possessed.

'From Rastignac's introduction to society in Paris, he had been led to contemn it utterly. From the year 1820 he thought, like the Baron, that honesty was a question of appearances; he looked upon the world as a mixture of corruption and rascality of every sort. If he admitted exceptions, he condemned the mass; he put no belief in any virtue—men did right or wrong, as circumstances decided. His worldly wisdom was the work of a moment; he learned his lesson at the summit of Père Lachaise one day when he buried a poor, good man there; it was his Delphine's father, who died deserted by his daughters and their husbands, a dupe of our society and of the truest affection. Rastignac then and there resolved to exploit this world, to wear full dress of virtue, honesty, and fine manners. He was empanoplied in selfishness. When the young scion of nobility discovered that Nucingen wore the same armour, he respected him much as some knight mounted upon a barb and arrayed in damascened steel would have respected an adversary equally well horsed and equipped at a tournament in the Middle Ages. But for the time he had grown effeminate amid the delights of Capua. The friendship of snch a woman as the Baronne de Nucingen is of a kind that sets a man abjuring egoism in all its forms.

Delphine had been deceived once already; in her first venture of the affections she came across a piece of Birmingham manufacture, in the shape of the late lamented de Marsay; and therefore she could not but feel a limitless affection for a young provincial with all the provincial's articles of faith. Her tenderness reacted upon Rastignac. So by the time that Nucingen had put his wife's friend into the harness in which the exploiter always gets the exploited, he had reached the precise juncture when he

(the Baron) meditated a third suspension of payment. To Rastignac he confided his position; he pointed out to Rastignac a means of making 'reparation.' As a consequence of his intimacy, he was expected to play the part of confederate. The Baron judged it unsafe to communicate the whole of his plot to his conjugal collaborator. Rastignac quite believed in impending disaster; and the Baron allowed him to believe further that he (Rastignac) saved the shop.

'But when there are so many threads in a skein, there are apt to be knots. Rastignac trembled for Delphine's money. He stipulated that Delphine must be independent and her estate separated from her husband's, swearing to himself that he would repay her by trebling her fortune. As, however, Rastignac said nothing of himself, Nucingen begged him to take, in the event of success, twenty-five shares of a thousand francs in the argentiferous lead-mines, and Eugène took them—not to offend him! Nucingen had put Rastignac up to this the day before that evening in the Rue Joubert when our friend counselled Malvina to marry. A cold shiver ran through Rastignac at the sight of so many happy folk in Paris going to and fro unconscious of the impending loss; even so a young commander might shiver at the first sight of an army drawn up before a battle. He saw the d'Aiglemonts, the d'Aldriggers, and Beaudenord. Poor little Isaure and Godefroid playing at love, what were they but Acis and Galatea under the rock which a hulking Polyphemus was about to send down upon them?'

'That monkey of a Bixiou has something almost like talent,' said Blondet.

'Oh! so I am not maundering now?' asked Bixiou, enjoying his success as he looked round at his surprised auditors.—'For two months past,' he continued, 'Godefroid had given himself up to all the little pleasures of preparation for the marriage. At such times men are

like birds building nests in spring; they come and go, pick up their bits of straw, and fly off with them in their beaks to line the nest that is to hold a brood of young birds by and by. Isaure's bridegroom had taken a house in the Rue de la Plancher at a thousand crowns, a comfortable little house neither too large nor too small, which suited them. Every morning he went round to take a look at the workmen and to superintend the painters. He had introduced "comfort" (the only good thing in England)—heating apparatus to maintain an even temperature all over the house; fresh, soft colours, carefully chosen furniture, neither too showy nor too much in the fashion; spring-blinds fitted to every window inside and out; silver plate and new carriages. He had seen to the stables, coach-house, and harness-room, where Toby Joby Paddy floundered and fidgeted about like a marmot let loose, apparently rejoiced to know that there would be women about the place and a "lady"! This fervent passion of a man that sets up housekeeping, choosing clocks, going to visit his betrothed with his pockets full of patterns of stuffs, consulting her as to the bedroom furniture, going, coming, and trotting about, for love's sake,—all this, I say, is a spectacle in the highest degree calculated to rejoice the hearts of honest people, especially tradespeople. And as nothing pleases folk better than the marriage of a good-looking young fellow of seven-and-twenty and a charming girl of nineteen that dances admirably well, Godefroid in his perplexity over the *corbeille* asked Mme. de Nucingen and Rastignac to breakfast with him and advise him on this all-important point. He hit likewise on the happy idea of asking his cousin d'Aiglemont and his wife to meet them, as well as Mme. de Sérizy. Women of the world are ready enough to join for once in an improvised breakfast-party at a bachelor's rooms.'

'It is their way of playing truant,' put in Blondet.

'Of course they went over the new house,' resumed Bixiou. 'Married women relish these little expedi-

tions as ogres relish warm flesh ; they feel young again with the young bliss, unspoiled as yet by fruition. Breakfast was served in Godefroid's sitting-room, decked out like a troop horse for a farewell to bachelor life. There were dainty little dishes such as women love to devour, nibble at, and sip of a morning, when they are usually alarmingly hungry and horribly afraid to confess to it. It would seem that a woman compromises herself by admitting that she is hungry.—"Why have you come alone?" inquired Godefroid when Rastignac appeared.—"Mme. de Nucingen is out of spirits; I will tell you all about it," answered Rastignac, with the air of a man whose temper has been tried.—"A quarrel?" hazarded Godefroid. — "No." — At four o'clock the women took flight for the Bois de Boulogne ; Rastignac stayed in the room and looked out of the window, fixing his melancholy gaze upon Toby Joby Paddy, who stood, his arms crossed in Napoleonic fashion, audaciously posted in front of Beaudenord's cab horse. The child could only control the animal with his shrill little voice, but the horse was afraid of Joby Toby.

'"Well," began Godefroid, "what is the matter with you, my dear fellow? You look gloomy and anxious; your gaiety is forced. You are tormented by incomplete happiness. It is wretched, and that is a fact, when one cannot marry the woman one loves at the mayor's office and the church."

'"Have you courage to hear what I have to say? I wonder whether you will see how much a man must be attached to a friend if he can be guilty of such a breach of confidence as this for his sake."

'Something in Rastignac's voice stung like a lash of a whip.

'"*What?*" asked Godefroid de Beaudenord, turning pale.

'"I was unhappy over your joy; I had not the heart to keep such a secret to myself when I saw all these preparations, your happiness in bloom."

'"Just say it out in three words!"

'"Swear to me on your honour that you will be as silent as the grave——"

'"As the grave," repeated Beaudenord.

'"That if one of your nearest relatives were concerned in this secret, he should not know it."

'"No."

'"Very well. Nucingen started to-night for Brussels. He must file his schedule if he cannot arrange a settlement. This very morning Delphine petitioned for the separation of her estate. You may still save your fortune."

'"How?" faltered Godefroid; the blood turned to ice in his veins.

'"Simply write to the Baron de Nucingen, antedating your letter a fortnight, and instruct him to invest all your capital in shares."—Rastignac suggested Claparon and Company, and continued—"You have a fortnight, a month, possibly three months, in which to realise and make something; the shares are still going up——"

'"But d'Aiglemont, who was here at breakfast with us, has a million in Nucingen's bank."

'"Look here; I do not know whether there will be enough of these shares to cover it; and besides, I am not his friend, I cannot betray Nucingen's confidence. You must not speak to d'Aiglemont. If you say a word, you must answer to me for the consequences."

'Godefroid stood stockstill for ten minutes.

'"Do you accept? Yes or no!" said the inexorable Rastignac.

'Godefroid took up the pen, wrote at Rastignac's dictation, and signed his name.

'"My poor cousin!" he cried.

'"Each for himself," said Rastignac. "And there is one more settled!" he added to himself as he left Beaudenord.

'While Rastignac was manœuvring thus in Paris, imagine the state of things on the Bourse. A friend of mine, a provincial, a stupid creature, once asked me as we came past the Bourse between four and five in the afternoon what all that crowd of chatterers was doing, what they could possibly find to say to each other, and why they were wandering to and fro when business in public securities was over for the day. "My friend," said I, "they have made their meal, and now they are digesting it; while they digest it, they gossip about their neighbours, or there would be no commercial security in Paris. Concerns are floated here, such and such a man—Palma, for instance, who is something the same here as Sinard at the Académie Royale des Sciences—Palma says, 'Let the speculation be made!' and the speculation is made."'

'What a man that Hebrew is,' put in Blondet; 'he has not had a university education, but a universal education. And universal does not in his case mean superficial; whatever he knows, he knows to the bottom. He has a genius, an intuitive faculty for business. He is the oracle of all the lynxes that rule the Paris market; they will not touch an investment until Palma has looked into it. He looks solemn, he listens, ponders, and reflects; his interlocutor thinks that after this consideration he has come round his man, till Palma says, "This will not do for me."—The most extraordinary thing about Palma, to my mind, is the fact that he and Werbrust were partners for ten years, and there was never the shadow of a disagreement between them.'

'That is the way with the very strong or the very weak; any two between the extremes fall out and lose no time in making enemies of each other,' said Couture.

'Nucingen, you see, had neatly and skilfully put a little bombshell under the colonnades of the Bourse, and towards four o'clock in the afternoon it exploded.—

" Here is something serious ; have you heard the news ? " asked du Tillet, drawing Werbrust into a corner. "Here is Nucingen gone off to Brussels, and his wife petitioning for the separation of her estate.'

'" Are you and he in it together for a liquidation ? " asked Werbrust, smiling.

'" No foolery, Werbrust," said du Tillet. " You know the holders of his paper. Now, look here. There is business in it. Shares in this new concern of ours have gone up twenty per cent. already ; they will go up to five-and-twenty by the end of the quarter ; you know why. They are going to pay a splendid dividend."

'" Sly dog," said Werbrust. " Get along with you ; you are a devil with long and sharp claws, and you have them deep in the butter."

'" Just let me speak, or we shall not have time to operate. I hit on the idea as soon as I heard the news. I positively saw Mme. de Nucingen crying ; she is afraid for her fortune."

'" Poor little thing ! " said the old Alsacien Jew, with an ironical expression. " Well ? " he added, as du Tillet was silent.

'" Well. At my place I have a thousand shares of a thousand francs in our concern ; Nucingen handed them over to me to put on the market, do you understand ? Good. Now let us buy up a million of Nucingen's paper at a discount of ten or twenty per cent., and we shall make a handsome percentage out of it. We shall be debtors and creditors both ; confusion will be worked ! But we must set about it carefully, or the holders may imagine that we are operating in Nucingen's interests."'

'Then Werbrust understood. He squeezed du Tillet's hand with an expression such as a woman's face wears when she is playing her neighbour a trick.

'Martin Falleix came up.—" Well, have you heard the news ? " he asked. " Nucingen has stopped payment."

'"Pooh," said Werbrust, "pray don't noise it about; give those that hold his paper a chance."

'"What is the cause of the smash; do you know?" put in Claparon.

'"You know nothing about it," said du Tillet. "There isn't any smash. Payment will be made in full. Nucingen will start again; I shall find him all the money he wants. I know the causes of the suspension. He put all his capital into Mexican securities, and they are sending him metal in return; old Spanish cannon cast in such an insane fashion that they melted down gold and bell-metal and church plate for it, and all the wreck of the Spanish dominion in the Indies. The specie is slow in coming, and the dear Baron is hard up. That is all."

'"It is a fact," said Werbrust; "I am taking his paper myself at twenty per cent. discount."

'The news spread swift as fire in a straw rick. The most contradictory reports got about. But such confidence was felt in the firm after the two previous suspensions, that every one stuck to Nucingen's paper. "Palma must lend us a hand," said Werbrust.

'Now Palma was the Kellers' oracle, and the Kellers were brimful of Nucingen's paper. A hint from Palma would be enough. Werbrust arranged with Palma, and he rang the alarm bell. There was a panic next day on the Bourse. The Kellers, acting on Palma's advice, let go Nucingen's paper at ten per cent. of loss; they set the example on 'Change, for they were supposed to know very well what they were about. Taillefer followed up with three hundred thousand francs at a discount of twenty per cent., and Martin Falleix with two hundred thousand at fifteen. Gigonnet saw what was going on. He helped to spread the panic, with a view to buying up Nucingen's paper himself and making a commission of two or three per cent. out of Werbrust.

'In a corner of the Bourse he came upon poor Matifat, who had three hundred thousand francs in Nucingen's bank. Matifat, ghastly and haggard, beheld the terrible Gigonnet, the bill-discounter of his old quarter, coming up to worry him. He shuddered in spite of himself.

'"Things are looking bad. There is a crisis on hand. Nucingen is compounding with his creditors. But this does not interest you, Daddy Matifat; you are out of business."

'"Oh, well, you are mistaken, Gigonnet; I am in for three hundred thousand francs. I meant to speculate in Spanish bonds."

'"Then you have saved your money. Spanish bonds would have swept everything away; whereas I am prepared to offer you something like fifty per cent. for your account with Nucingen."

'"I would rather wait for the composition," said Matifat; "I never knew a banker yet that paid less than fifty per cent. Ah, if it were only a matter of ten per cent. of loss——" added the retired man of drugs.

'"Well, will you take fifteen?" asked Gigonnet.

'"You are very keen about it, it seems to me," said Matifat.

'"Good-night."

'"Will you take twelve?"

'"Done," said Gigonnet.

'Before night two millions had been bought up in the names of the three chance-united confederates, and posted by du Tillet to the debit side of Nucingen's account. Next day they drew their premium.

'The dainty little old Baroness d'Aldrigger was at breakfast with her two daughters and Godefroid, when Rastignac came in with a diplomatic air to steer the conversation on the financial crisis. The Baron de Nucingen felt a lively regard for the d'Aldrigger family; he was prepared, if things went amiss, to cover the Baroness's account with his best securities, to wit, some

shares in the argentiferous lead-mines, but the application must come from the lady.

'"Poor Nucingen!" said the Baroness. "What can have become of him?"

'"He is in Belgium. His wife is petitioning for a separation of her property; but he has gone to see if he can arrange with some bankers to see him through."

'"Dear me! That reminds me of my poor husband! Dear M. de Rastignac, how you must feel this, so attached as you are to the house!"

'"If all the indifferent are covered, his personal friends will be rewarded later on. He will pull through; he is a clever man."

'"An honest man, above all things," said the Baroness.

'A month later, Nucingen met all his liabilities, with no formalities beyond the letters by which creditors signified the investments which they preferred to take in exchange for their capital; and with no action on the part of other banks beyond registering the transfer of Nucingen's paper for the investments in favour.

'While du Tillet, Werbrust, Claparon, Gigonnet, and others that thought themselves clever were fetching in Nucingen's paper from abroad with a premium of one per cent.—for it was still worth their while to exchange it for securities in a rising market—there was all the more talk on the Bourse, because there was nothing now to fear. They babbled over Nucingen; he was discussed and judged; they even slandered him. His luxurious life, his enterprises! When a man has so much on his hands, he overreaches himself, and so forth, and so forth.

'The talk was at its height, when several people were greatly astonished to receive letters from Geneva, Basel, Milan, Naples, Genoa, Marseilles, and London, in which their correspondents, previously advised of the failure, informed them that somebody was offering one per cent.

for Nucingen's paper! "There is something up," said the lynxes of the Bourse.

'The Court meanwhile had granted the application for Mme. de Nucingen's separation as to her estate, and the question became still more complicated. The newspapers announced the return of M. le Baron de Nucingen from a journey to Belgium; he had been arranging, it was said, with a well-known Belgian firm to resume the working of some coal-pits in the Bois de Bossut. The Baron himself appeared on the Bourse, and never even took the trouble to contradict the slanders circulating against him. He scorned to reply through the press; he simply bought a splendid estate just outside Paris for two millions of francs. Six weeks afterwards, the Bordeaux shipping intelligence announced that two vessels with cargoes of bullion to the amount of seven millions, consigned to the firm of Nucingen, were lying in the river.

'Then it was plain to Palma, Werbrust, and du Tillet that the trick had been played. Nobody else was any the wiser. The three scholars studied the means by which the great bubble had been created, saw that it had been preparing for eleven months, and pronounced Nucingen the greatest financier in Europe.

'Rastignac understood nothing of all this, but he had the four hundred thousand francs which Nucingen had allowed him to shear from the Parisian sheep, and he portioned his sisters. D'Aiglemont, at a hint from his cousin Beaudenord, besought Rastignac to accept ten per cent. upon his million if he would undertake to convert it into shares in a canal which is still to make, for Nucingen worked things with the Government to such purpose that the concessionaries find it to their interest not to finish their scheme. Charles Grandet implored Delphine's lover to use his interest to secure shares for him in exchange for his cash. And altogether Rastignac played the part of Law for ten days; he had the prettiest

duchesses in France praying him to allot shares to them, and to-day the young man very likely has an income of forty thousand livres, derived in the first instance from the argentiferous lead-mines.'

'If every one was better off, who can have lost?' asked Finot.

'Hear the conclusion,' rejoined Bixiou. 'The Marquis d'Aiglemont and Beaudenord (I put them forward as two examples out of many) kept their allotted shares, enticed by the so-called dividend that fell due a few months afterwards. They had another three per cent. on their capital, they sang Nucingen's praises, and took his part at a time when everybody suspected that he was going bankrupt. Godefroid married his beloved Isaure and took shares in the mines to the value of a hundred thousand francs. The Nucingens gave a ball even more splendid than people expected of them on the occasion of the wedding; Delphine's present to the bride was a charming set of rubies. Isaure danced, a happy wife, a girl no longer. The little Baroness was more than ever a Shepherdess of the Alps. The ball was at its height when Malvina, the Andalouse of Musset's poem, heard du Tillet's voice drily advising her to take Desroches. Desroches, warmed to the right degree by Rastignac and Nucingen, tried to come to an understanding financially; but at the first hint of shares in the mines for the bride's portion, he broke off and went back to the Matifats in the Rue du Cherche-Midi, only to find the accursed canal shares which Gigonnet had foisted on Matifat in lieu of cash.

'They had not long to wait for the crash. The firm of Claparon did business on too large a scale, the capital was locked up, the concern ceased to serve its purposes, or to pay dividends, though the speculations were sound. These misfortunes coincided with the events of 1827. In 1829 it was too well known that Claparon was a man of straw set up by the two giants; he fell from his

pedestal. Shares that had fetched twelve hundred and fifty francs fell to four hundred, though intrinsically they were worth six. Nucingen, knowing their value, bought them up at four.

'Meanwhile the little Baroness d'Aldrigger had sold out of the mines that paid no dividends, and Godefroid had reinvested the money belonging to his wife and her mother in Claparon's concern. Debts compelled them to realise when the shares were at their lowest, so that of seven hundred thousand francs only two hundred thousand remained. They made a clearance, and all that was left was prudently invested in the three per cents. at seventy-five. Godefroid, the sometime gay and careless bachelor who had lived without taking thought all his life long, found himself saddled with a little goose of a wife totally unfitted to bear aaversity (indeed, before six months were over, he had witnessed the anserine transformation of his beloved), to say nothing of a mother-in-law whose mind ran on pretty dresses while she had not bread to eat. The two families must live together to live at all. It was only by stirring up all his considerably chilled interest that Godefroid got a post in the audit department. His friends?—They were out of town. His relatives?—All astonishment and promises. "What! my dear boy! Oh! count upon me! Poor fellow!" and Beaudenord was clean forgotten fifteen minutes afterwards. He owed his place to Nucingen and de Vandenesse.

'And to-day these so estimable and unfortunate people are living on a third floor (not counting the entre-sol) in the Rue du Mont Thabor. Malvina, the Adolphus's pearl of a granddaughter, has not a farthing. She gives music-lessons, not to be a burden upon her brother-in-law. You may see a tall, dark, thin, withered woman, like a mummy escaped from Passalacqua's, about afoot through the streets of Paris. In 1830 Beaudenord lost his situation just as his wife presented him with a fourth

child. A family of eight and two servants (Wirth and his wife) and an income of eight thousand livres. And at this moment the mines are paying so well, that an original share of a thousand francs brings in a dividend of cent. per cent.

Rastignac and Mme. de Nucingen bought the shares sold by the Baroness and Godefroid. The Revolution made a peer of France of Nucingen and a Grand Officer of the Legion of Honour. He has not stopped payment since 1830, but still I hear that he has something like seventeen millions. He put faith in the Ordinances of July, sold out of all his investments, and boldly put his money into the funds when the three per cents. stood at forty-five. He persuaded the Tuileries that this was done out of devotion, and about the same time he and du Tillet between them swallowed down three millions belonging to that great scamp Philippe Bridau.

'Quite lately our Baron was walking along the Rue de Rivoli on his way to the Bois when he met the Baroness d'Aldrigger under the colonnade. The little old lady wore a tiny green bonnet with a rose-coloured lining, a flowered gown, and a mantilla; altogether, she was more than ever the Shepherdess of the Alps. She could no more be made to understand the causes of her poverty than the sources of her wealth. As she went along, leaning upon poor Malvina, that model of heroic devotion, she seemed to be the young girl and Malvina the old mother. Wirth followed them, carrying an umbrella.

'"Dere are beoples whose vordune I vound it imbossible to make," said the Baron, addressing his companion (M. Cointet, a cabinet minister). "Now dot de baroxysm off brincibles haf bassed off, chust reinshtate dot boor Peautenord."

'So Beaudenord went back to his desk, thanks to Nucingen's good offices; and the d'Aldriggers extol Nucingen as a hero of friendship, for he always sends

the little Shepherdess of the Alps and her daughters invitations to his balls. No creature whatsoever can be made to understand that the Baron yonder three times did his best to plunder the public without breaking the letter of the law, and enriched people in spite of himself. No one has a word to say against him. If anybody should suggest that a big capitalist often is another word for a cut-throat, it would be a most egregious calumny. If stocks rise and fall, if property improves and depreciates, the fluctuations of the market are caused by a common movement, a something in the air, a tide in the affairs of men subject like other tides to lunar influences. The great Arago is much to blame for giving us no scientific theory to account for this important phenomenon. The only outcome of all this is an axiom which I have never seen anywhere in print——'

'And that is?'

'The debtor is more than a match for the creditor.'

'Oh!' said Blondet. 'For my own part, all that we have been saying seems to me to be a paraphrase of the epigram in which Montesquieu summed up *l'Esprit des Lois*.'

'What?' said Finot.

'Laws are like spiders' webs; the big flies get through, while the little ones are caught.'

'Then, what are you for?' asked Finot.

'For absolute government, the only kind of government under which enterprises against the spirit of the law can be put down. Yes. Arbitrary rule is the salvation of a country when it comes to the support of justice, for the right of mercy is strictly one-sided. The king can pardon a fraudulent bankrupt; he cannot do anything for the victims. The letter of the law is fatal to modern society.'

'Just get that into the electors' heads!' said Bixiou.

'Some one has undertaken to do it.'

'Who?'

'Time. As the Bishop of Leon said, "Liberty is ancient, but kingship is eternal"; any nation in its right mind returns to monarchical government in one form or another.'

'I say, there was somebody next door,' said Finot, hearing us rise to go.

'There always is somebody next door,' retorted Bixiou. But he must have been drunk.

PARIS, *November* 1837.

FACINO CANE

I ONCE used to live in a little street which probably is not known to you—the Rue de Lesdiguières. It is a turning out of the Rue Saint-Antoine, beginning just opposite a fountain near the Place de la Bastille, and ending in the Rue de la Cerisaie. Love of knowledge stranded me in a garret; my nights I spent in work, my days in reading at the Bibliothèque d'Orléans, close by. I lived frugally, I had accepted the conditions of the monastic life, necessary conditions for every worker, scarcely permitting myself a walk along the Boulevard Bourdon when the weather was fine. One passion only had power to draw me from my studies; and yet, what was that passion but a study of another kind? I used to watch the manners and customs of the Faubourg, its inhabitants, and their characteristics. As I dressed no better than a working man, and cared nothing for appearances, I did not put them on their guard; I could join a group and look on while they drove bargains or wrangled among themselves on their way home from work. Even then observation had come to be an instinct with me; a faculty of penetrating to the soul without neglecting the body; or rather, a power of grasping external details so thoroughly that they never detained me for a moment, and at once I passed beyond and through them. I could enter into the life of the human creatures whom I watched, just as the dervish in the *Arabian Nights* could pass into any soul or body after pronouncing a certain formula.

If I met a working man and his wife in the streets between eleven o'clock and midnight on their way home from the Ambigu Comique, I used to amuse myself by following them from the Boulevard du Pont aux Choux to the Boulevard Beaumarchais. The good folk would begin by talking about the play; then from one thing to another they would come to their own affairs, and the mother would walk on and on, heedless of complaints or question from the little one that dragged at her hand, while she and her husband reckoned up the wages to be paid on the morrow, and spent the money in a score of different ways. Then came domestic details, lamentations over the excessive dearness of potatoes, or the length of the winter and the high price of block fuel, together with forcible representations of amounts owing to the baker, ending in an acrimonious dispute, in the course of which such couples reveal their characters in picturesque language. As I listened, I could make their lives mine, I felt their rags on my back, I walked with their gaping shoes on my feet; their cravings, their needs, had all passed into my soul, or my soul had passed into theirs. It was the dream of a waking man. I waxed hot with them over the foreman's tyranny, or the bad customers that made them call again and again for payment.

To come out of my own ways of life, to be another than myself through a kind of intoxication of the intellectual faculties, and to play this game at will, such was my recreation. Whence comes the gift? Is it a kind of second sight? Is it one of those powers which when abused end in madness? I have never tried to discover its source; I possess it, I use it, that is all. But this it behoves you to know, that in those days I began to resolve the heterogeneous mass known as the People into its elements, and to evaluate its good and bad qualities. Even then I realised the possibilities of my suburb, that hotbed of revolution in which heroes, inventors, and practical men of science, rogues and scoundrels, virtues

and vices, were all packed together by poverty, stifled by necessity, drowned in drink, and consumed by ardent spirits.

You would not imagine how many adventures, how many tragedies, lie buried away out of sight in that Dolorous City; how much horror and beauty lurks there. No imagination can reach the Truth, no one can go down into that city to make discoveries; for one must needs descend too low into its depths to see the wonderful scenes of tragedy or comedy enacted there, the masterpieces brought forth by chance.

I do not know how it is that I have kept the following story so long untold. It is one of the curious things that stop in the bag from which Memory draws out stories at haphazard, like numbers in a lottery. There are plenty of tales just as strange and just as well hidden still left; but some day, you may be sure, their turn will come.

One day my charwoman, a working man's wife, came to beg me to honour her sister's wedding with my presence. If you are to realise what this wedding was like, you must know that I paid my charwoman, poor creature, four francs a month; for which sum she came every morning to make my bed, clean my shoes, brush my clothes, sweep the room, and make ready my breakfast, before going to her day's work of turning the handle of a machine, at which hard drudgery she earned fivepence. Her husband, a cabinetmaker, made four francs a day at his trade; but as they had three children, it was all that they could do to gain an honest living. Yet I have never met with more sterling honesty than in this man and his wife. For five years after I left the quarter, Mère Vaillant used to come on my birthday with a bunch of flowers and some oranges for me—she that had never a sixpence to put by! Want had drawn us together. I never could give her more than a ten-franc

piece, and often I had to borrow the money for the occasion. This will perhaps explain my promise to go to the wedding; I hoped to efface myself in these poor people's merry-making.

The banquet and the ball were given on a first floor above a wineshop in the Rue de Charenton. It was a large room, lighted by oil lamps with tin reflectors. A row of wooden benches ran round the walls, which were black with grime to the height of the tables. Here some eighty persons, all in their Sunday best, tricked out with ribbons and bunches of flowers, all of them on pleasure bent, were dancing away with heated visages as if the world were about to come to an end. Bride and bridegroom exchanged salutes to the general satisfaction, amid a chorus of facetious 'Oh, ohs!' and 'Ah, ahs!' less really indecent than the furtive glances of young girls that have been well brought up. There was something indescribably infectious about the rough, homely enjoyment in all countenances.

But neither the faces, nor the wedding, nor the wedding-guests have anything to do with my story. Simply bear them in mind as the odd setting to it. Try to realise the scene, the shabby red-painted wineshop, the smell of wine, the yells of merriment; try to feel that you are really in the faubourg, among old people, working men and poor women giving themselves up to a night's enjoyment.

The band consisted of a fiddle, a clarionet, and a flageolet from the Blind Asylum. The three were paid seven francs in a lump sum for the night. For the money, they gave us, not Beethoven certainly, nor yet Rossini; they played as they had the will and the skill; and every one in the room (with charming delicacy of feeling) refrained from finding fault. The music made such a brutal assault on the drum of my ear, that after a first glance round the room my eyes fell at once upon the blind trio, and the sight of their uniform inclined me from

the first to indulgence. As the artists stood in a window recess, it was difficult to distinguish their faces except at close quarters, and I kept away at first; but when I came nearer (I hardly know why) I thought of nothing else; the wedding party and the music ceased to exist, my curiosity was roused to the highest pitch, for my soul passed into the body of the clarionet player.

The fiddle and the flageolet were neither of them interesting; their faces were of the ordinary type among the blind—earnest, attentive, and grave. Not so the clarionet player; any artist or philosopher must have come to a stop at the sight of him.

Picture to yourself a plaster mask of Dante in the red lamplight, with a forest of silver-white hair above the brows. Blindness intensified the expression of bitterness and sorrow in that grand face of his; the dead eyes were lighted up, as it were, by a thought within that broke forth like a burning flame, lit by one sole insatiable desire, written large in vigorous characters upon an arching brow scored across with as many lines as an old stone wall.

The old man was playing at random, without the slightest regard for time or tune. His fingers travelled mechanically over the worn keys of his instrument; he did not trouble himself over a false note now and again (a *canard*, in the language of the orchestra), neither did the dancers, nor, for that matter, did my old Italian's acolytes; for I had made up my mind that he must be an Italian, and an Italian he was. There was something great, something too of the despot about this old Homer bearing within him an *Odyssey* doomed to oblivion. The greatness was so real that it triumphed over his abject position; the despotism so much a part of him, that it rose above his poverty.

There are violent passions which drive a man to good or evil, making of him a hero or a convict; of these there was not one that had failed to leave its traces on the grandly-hewn, lividly Italian face. You trembled lest a

flash of thought should suddenly light up the deep sightless hollows under the grizzled brows, as you might fear to see brigands with torches and poniards in the mouth of a cavern. You felt that there was a lion in that cage of flesh, a lion spent with useless raging against iron bars. The fires of despair had burned themselves out into ashes, the lava had cooled; but the tracks of the flames, the wreckage, and a little smoke remained to bear witness to the violence of the eruption, the ravages of the fire. These images crowded up at the sight of the clarionet player, till the thoughts now grown cold in his face burned hot within my soul.

The fiddle and the flageolet took a deep interest in bottles and glasses; at the end of a country-dance, they hung their instruments from a button on their reddish-coloured coats, and stretched out their hands to a little table set in the window recess to hold their liquor supply. Each time they did so they held out a full glass to the Italian, who could not reach it for himself because he sat in front of the table, and each time the Italian thanked them with a friendly nod. All their movements were made with the precision which always amazes you so much at the Blind Asylum. You could almost think that they can see. I came nearer to listen; but when I stood beside them, they evidently guessed I was not a working man, and kept themselves to themselves.

'What part of the world do you come from, you that are playing the clarionet?'

'From Venice,' he said, with a trace of Italian accent.

'Have you always been blind, or did it come on afterwards——?'

'Afterwards,' he answered quickly. 'A cursed gutta serena.'

'Venice is a fine city; I have always had a fancy to go there.'

The old man's face lighted up, the wrinkles began to work, he was violently excited.

'If I went with you, you would not lose your time,' he said.

'Don't talk about Venice to our Doge,' put in the fiddle, 'or you will start him off, and he has stowed away a couple of bottles as it is—has the prince!'

'Come, strike up, Daddy Canard!' added the flageolet, and the three began to play. But while they executed the four figures of a square dance, the Venetian was scenting my thoughts; he guessed the great interest I felt in him. The dreary, dispirited look died out of his face, some mysterious hope brightened his features and slid like a blue flame over his wrinkles. He smiled and wiped his brow, that fearless, terrible brow of his, and at length grew gay like a man mounted on his hobby.

'How old are you?' I asked.

'Eighty-two.'

'How long have you been blind?'

'For very nearly fifty years,' he said, and there was that in his tone which told me that his regret was for something more than his lost sight, for great power of which he had been robbed.

'Then why do they call you "the Doge"?' I asked.

'Oh, it is a joke. I am a Venetian noble, and I might have been a doge like any one else.'

'What is your name?'

'Here, in Paris, I am Père Canet,' he said. 'It was the only way of spelling my name on the register. But in Italy I am Marco Facino Cane, Prince of Varese.'

'What, are you descended from the great *condottiere* Facino Cane, whose lands won by the sword were taken by the Dukes of Milan?'

'*È vero*,' returned he. 'His son's life was not safe under the Visconti; he fled to Venice, and his name was inscribed on the Golden Book. And now neither Cane nor Golden Book are in existence.' His gesture startled me; it told of patriotism extinguished and weariness of life.

'But if you were once a Venetian senator, you must have been a wealthy man. How did you lose your fortune?'

'In evil days.'

He waved away the glass of wine handed to him by the flageolet, and bowed his head. He had no heart to drink. These details were not calculated to extinguish my curiosity.

As the three ground out the music of the square dance, I gazed at the old Venetian noble, thinking thoughts that set a young man's mind afire at the age of twenty. I saw Venice and the Adriatic; I saw her ruin in the ruin of the face before me. I walked to and fro in that city, so beloved of her citizens; I went from the Rialto Bridge, along the Grand Canal, and from the Riva degli Schiavoni to the Lido, returning to St. Mark's, that cathedral so unlike all others in its sublimity. I looked up at the windows of the Casa Doro, each with its different sculptured ornaments; I saw old palaces rich in marbles, saw all the wonders which a student beholds with the more sympathetic eyes because visible things take their colour of his fancy, and the sight of realities cannot rob him of the glory of his dreams. Then I traced back a course of life for this latest scion of a race of condottieri, tracking down his misfortunes, looking for the reasons of the deep moral and physical degradation out of which the lately revived sparks of greatness and nobility shone so much the more brightly. My ideas, no doubt, were passing through his mind, for all processes of thought-communications are far more swift, I think, in blind people, because their blindness compels them to concentrate their attention. I had not long to wait for proof that we were in sympathy in this way. Facino Cane left off playing, and came up to me. 'Let us go out!' he said; his tones thrilled through me like an electric shock. I gave him my arm, and we went.

Outside in the street he said, 'Will you take me back

to Venice? will you be my guide? Will you put faith in me? You shall be richer than ten of the richest houses in Amsterdam or London, richer than Rothschild; in short, you shall have the fabulous wealth of the *Arabian Nights*.'

The man was mad, I thought; but in his voice there was a potent something which I obeyed. I allowed him to lead, and he went in the direction of the Fossés de la Bastille, as if he could see; walking till he reached a lonely spot down by the river, just where the bridge has since been built at the junction of the Canal Saint-Martin and the Seine. Here he sat down on a stone, and I, sitting opposite to him, saw the old man's hair gleaming like threads of silver in the moonlight. The stillness was scarcely troubled by the sound of the far-off thunder of traffic along the boulevards; the clear night air and everything about us combined to make a strangely unreal scene.

'You talk of millions to a young man,' I began, 'and do you think that he will shrink from enduring any number of hardships to gain them? Are you not laughing at me?'

'May I die unshriven,' he cried vehemently, 'if all that I am about to tell you is not true. I was one-and-twenty years old, like you at this moment. I was rich, I was handsome, and a noble by birth. I began with the first madness of all—with Love. I loved as no one can love nowadays. I have hidden myself in a chest, at the risk of a dagger thrust, for nothing more than the promise of a kiss. To die for Her—it seemed to me to be a whole life in itself. In 1760 I fell in love with a lady of the Vendramin family; she was eighteen years old, and married to a Sagredo, one of the richest senators, a man of thirty, madly in love with his wife. My mistress and I were guiltless as cherubs when the *sposo* caught us together talking of love. He was armed, I was not, but he missed me; I sprang upon him and killed him with my two



hands, wringing his neck as if he had been a chicken. I wanted Bianca to fly with me; but she would not. That is the way with women! So I went alone. I was condemned to death, and my property was confiscated and made over to my next-of-kin; but I had carried off my diamonds, five of Titian's pictures taken down from their frames and rolled up, and all my gold.

'I went to Milan, no one molested me, my affair in nowise interested the State.—One small observation before I go further,' he continued, after a pause, 'whether it is true or no that the mother's fancies at the time of conception or in the months before birth can influence her child, this much is certain, my mother during her pregnancy had a passion for gold, and I am the victim of a monomania, of a craving for gold which must be gratified. Gold is so much a necessity of life for me, that I have never been without it; I must have gold to toy with and finger. As a young man I always wore jewellery, and carried two or three hundred ducats about with me wherever I went.'

He drew a couple of gold coins from his pocket and showed them to me as he spoke.

'I can tell by instinct when gold is near. Blind as I am, I stop before the jewellers' shop windows. That passion was the ruin of me; I took to gambling to play with gold. I was not a cheat, I was cheated, I ruined myself. I lost all my fortune. Then the longing to see Bianca once more possessed me like a frenzy. I stole back to Venice and found her again. For six months I was happy; she hid me in her house and fed me. I thought thus deliciously to finish my days. But the Provveditore courted her, and guessed that he had a rival; we in Italy can feel that. He played the spy upon us, and surprised us together in bed, base wretch! You may judge what a fight for life it was; I did not kill him outright, but I wounded him dangerously.

'That adventure broke my luck. I have never found another Bianca; I have known great pleasures; but among the most celebrated women of the court of Louis xv. I never found my beloved Venetian's charm, her love, her great qualities.

'The Provveditore called his servants, the palace was surrounded and entered; I fought for my life that I might die beneath Bianca's eyes; Bianca helped me to kill the Provveditore. Once before she had refused flight with me; but after six months of happiness she wished only to die with me, and received several thrusts. I was entangled in a great cloak that they flung over me, carried down to a gondola, and hurried to the Pozzi dungeons. I was twenty-two years old; I gripped the hilt of my broken sword so hard, that they could only have taken it from me by cutting off my hand at the wrist. A curious chance, or rather the instinct of self-preservation, led me to hide the fragment of the blade in a corner of my cell, as if it might still be of use. They tended me; none of my wounds were serious. At two-and-twenty one can recover from anything. I was to lose my head on the scaffold. I shammed illness to gain time. It seemed to me that the canal lay just outside my cell. I thought to make my escape by boring a hole through the wall and swimming for my life. I based my hopes on the following reasons.

'Every time that the gaoler came with my food, there was light enough to read directions written on the walls—"Side of the Palace," "Side of the Canal," "Side of the Vaults." At last I saw a design in this, but I did not trouble myself much about the meaning of it; the actual incomplete condition of the Ducal Palace accounted for it. The longing to regain my freedom gave me something like genius. Groping about with my fingers, I spelt out an Arabic inscription on the wall. The author of the work informed those to come after him that he had loosened two stones in the lowest course of

masonry and hollowed out eleven feet beyond underground. As he went on with his excavations, it became necessary to spread the fragments of stone and mortar over the floor of his cell. But even if gaolers and inquisitors had not felt sure that the structure of the buildings was such that no watch was needed below, the level of the Pozzi dungeons being several steps below the threshold, it was possible gradually to raise the earthen floor without exciting the warder's suspicions.

'The tremendous labour had profited nothing—nothing at least to him that began it. The very fact that it was left unfinished told of the unknown worker's death. Unless his devoted toil was to be wasted for ever, his successor must have some knowledge of Arabic, but I had studied Oriental languages at the Armenian Convent. A few words written on the back of the stone recorded the unhappy man's fate; he had fallen a victim to his great possessions; Venice had coveted his wealth and seized upon it. A whole month went by before I obtained any result; but whenever I felt my strength failing as I worked, I heard the chink of gold, I saw gold spread before me, I was dazzled by diamonds.—Ah! wait.

'One night my blunted steel struck on wood. I whetted the fragment of my blade and cut a hole; I crept on my belly like a serpent; I worked naked and mole-fashion, my hands in front of me, using the stone itself to gain a purchase. I was to appear before my judges in two days' time, I made a final effort, and that night I bored through the wood and felt that there was space beyond.

'Judge of my surprise when I applied my eye to the hole. I was in the ceiling of a vault, heaps of gold were dimly visible in the faint light. The Doge himself and one of the Ten stood below; I could hear their voices and sufficient of their talk to know that this was the Secret Treasury of the Republic, full of the gifts of Doges and

reserves of booty called the Tithe of Venice from the spoils of military expeditions. I was saved!

'When the gaoler came I proposed that he should help me to escape and fly with me, and that we should take with us as much as we could carry. There was no reason for hesitation; he agreed. Vessels were about to sail for the Levant. All possible precautions were taken. Bianca furthered the schemes which I suggested to my accomplice. It was arranged that Bianca should only rejoin us in Smyrna for fear of exciting suspicion. In a single night the hole was enlarged, and we dropped down into the Secret Treasury of Venice.

'What a night that was! Four great casks full of gold stood there. In the outer room silver pieces were piled in heaps, leaving a gangway between by which to cross the chamber. Banks of silver coins surrounded the walls to the height of five feet.

'I thought the gaoler would go mad. He sang and laughed and danced and capered among the gold, till I threatened to strangle him if he made a sound or wasted time. In his joy he did not notice at first the table where the diamonds lay. I flung myself upon these, and deftly filled the pockets of my sailor's jacket and trousers with the stones. Ah! Heaven, I did not take the third of them. Gold ingots lay underneath the table. I persuaded my companion to fill as many bags as we could carry with the gold, and made him understand that this was our only chance of escaping detection abroad.

'"Pearls, rubies, and diamonds might be recognised," I told him.

'Covetous though we were, we could not possibly take more than two thousand livres weight of gold, which meant six journeys across the prison to the gondola. The sentinel at the water-gate was bribed with a bag containing ten livres weight of gold; and as for the two gondoliers, they believed they were serving the Republic. At daybreak we set out.

'Once upon the open sea, when I thought of that night, when I recollected all that I had felt, when the vision of that great hoard arose before my eyes, and I computed that I had left behind thirty millions in silver, twenty in gold, and many more in diamonds, pearls, and rubies—then a sort of madness began to work in me. I had the gold fever.

'We landed at Smyrna and took ship at once for France. As we went on board the French vessel, Heaven favoured me by ridding me of my accomplice. I did not think at the time of all the possible consequences of this mishap, and rejoiced not a little. We were so completely unnerved by all that had happened, that we were stupid, we said not a word to each other, we waited till it should be safe to enjoy ourselves at our ease. It was not wonderful that the rogue's head was dizzy. You shall see how heavily God has punished me.

'I never knew a quiet moment until I had sold two-thirds of my diamonds in London or Amsterdam, and held the value of my gold dust in a negotiable shape. For five years I hid myself in Madrid, then in 1770 I came to Paris with a Spanish name, and led as brilliant a life as may be. Then in the midst of my pleasures, as I enjoyed a fortune of six millions, I was smitten with blindness. I do not doubt but that my infirmity was brought on by my sojourn in the cell and my work in the stone, if, indeed, my peculiar faculty for "seeing" gold was not an abuse of the power of sight which predestined me to lose it. Bianca was dead.

'At this time I had fallen in love with a woman to whom I thought to link my fate. I had told her the secret of my name; she belonged to a powerful family; she was a friend of Mme. du Barry; I hoped everything from the favour shown me by Louis XV.; I trusted in her. Acting on her advice, I went to England to consult a famous oculist, and after a stay of several months in London she deserted me in Hyde Park. She had

stripped me of all that I had, and left me without resource. Nor could I make complaint, for to disclose my name was to lay myself open to the vengeance of my native city; I could appeal to no one for aid, I feared Venice. The woman put spies about me to exploit my infirmity. I spare you a tale of adventures worthy of Gil Blas.—Your Revolution followed. For two whole years that creature kept me at the Bicêtre as a lunatic, then she gained admittance for me at the Blind Asylum; there was no help for it, I went. I could not kill her; Icould not see; and I was so poor that I could not pay another arm.

'If only I had taken counsel with my gaoler, Benedetto Carpi, before I lost him, I might have known the exact position of my cell, I might have found my way back to the Treasury and returned to Venice when Napoleon crushed the Republic——

'Still, blind as I am, let us go back to Venice! I shall find the door of my prison, I shall see the gold through the prison walls, I shall hear it where it lies under the water; for the events which brought about the fall of Venice befell in such a way that the secret of the hoard must have perished with Bianca's brother, Vendramin, a doge to whom I looked to make my peace with the Ten. I sent memorials to the First Consul; I proposed an agreement with the Emperor of Austria; every one sent me about my business for a lunatic. Come! we will go to Venice; let us set out as beggars, we shall come back millionaires. We will buy back my estates, and you shall be my heir! You shall be Prince of Varese!'

My head was swimming. For me his confidences reached the proportions of tragedy; at the sight of that white head of his and beyond it the black water in the trenches of the Bastille lying still as a canal in Venice, I had no words to answer him. Facino Cane thought, no doubt, that I judged him, as the rest had done, with a disdainful pity; his gesture expressed the whole philosophy of despair.

Perhaps his story had taken him back to happy days and to Venice. He caught up his clarionet and made plaintive music, playing a Venetian boat-song with something of his lost skill, the skill of the young patrician lover. It was a sort of *Super flumina Babylonis*. Tears filled my eyes. Any belated persons walking along the Boulevard Bourdon must have stood still to listen to an exile's last prayer, a last cry of regret for a lost name, mingled with memories of Bianca. But gold soon gained the upper hand, the fatal passion quenched the light of youth.

'I see it always,' he said; 'dreaming or waking, I see it; and as I pace to and fro, I pace in the Treasury, and the diamonds sparkle. I am not as blind as you think; gold and diamonds light up my night, the night of the last Facino Cane, for my title passes to the Memmi. My God! the murderer's punishment was not long delayed! *Ave Maria*,' and he repeated several prayers that I did not heed.

'We will go to Venice!' I said, when he rose.

'Then I have found a man!' he cried, with his face on fire.

I gave him my arm and went home with him. We reached the gates of the Blind Asylum just as some of the wedding guests were returning along the street, shouting at the tops of their voices. He squeezed my hand.

'Shall we start to-morrow?' he asked.

'As soon as we can get some money.'

'But we can go on foot. I will beg. I am strong, and you feel young when you see gold before you.'

Facino Cane died before the winter was out after a two months' illness. The poor man had taken a chill.

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